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June 21, 1996

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TENNESSEE--Meetings for the week of June 24-28.  
ARKANSAS--Town event fosters healing among whites, blacks, Native Americans.  
DALLAS--Texas community rallies to help burned churches.  
SOUTH CAROLINA--Church's 'parish nurse' aids body, mind & spirit.  
KENTUCKY--Church's 'parish nurse' aids body, mind & spirit.

CALENDAR

WEST VIRGINIA--Education Commission trustee meeting, June 23-24, Pipe Stem.

Town event fosters healing among  
whites, blacks, Native Americans

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RUSSELLVILLE, Ark. (BP)--A commemoration of the first Protestant mission in Arkansas gave opportunity for racial reconciliation among whites, blacks and Native Americans during "Old Dwight Mission Gospel Heritage Day" in Russellville, Ark., June 2.

Don Erwin, chairman of the Russellville Area Ministerial Association-sponsored event, recounted the historical significance of Old Dwight Mission in Arkansas: "If you go down to the Arkansas Territorial Restoration (in Little Rock), you'll find an 1822 map of Arkansas. There are three sites listed on that map: Old Arkansas Post, Little Rock and Dwight Mission.

"Dwight Mission was the first Protestant school in Arkansas and the first mission to the Western Cherokees, who were located in this river valley," said Erwin, teaching elder for Russellville's Fellowship (Evangelical) Church. "There were about 2,000 Cherokees here around 1820 when (missionary) Cephas Washburn and six other missionaries came from New York and New England with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions."

Erwin noted: "Dwight Mission has been known through the years as a school and the gospel ministry aspect of Dwight Mission has been neglected or overlooked. But when you look at the historical record, you find that the missionaries considered the gospel to be the forefront of their efforts."

And, Erwin said, Russellville-area Christians wanted to highlight the racial diversity the mission represented. "What we noted from the historical record of Dwight Mission is that on May 13, 1821, when they had the first Sabbath day service at the mission, there were Cherokees, blacks and Anglo settlers at that service. It was a picture of racial reconciliation and the Dwight missionaries celebrated that."

The two-part event in Russellville included an afternoon at Lake Dardanelle State Park of hymns played on 19th-century instruments, a reenactment of the mission's first worship service in 1821 and a message of reconciliation from John Dawson, international director of urban missions for Youth With a Mission and author of "Healing America's Wounds." A worship service was held at First Baptist Church, Russellville, that evening.

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Wayne Drain, senior pastor of Fellowship of Christians (Evangelical) Church in Russellville, read a proclamation of apology to the Cherokee Nation for "sins against the Cherokee," including the breaking of treaties and the forced march of Cherokees to Oklahoma known as "The Trail of Tears," and Drain asked for forgiveness from the Cherokee Nation.

His appeal was met favorably by Garland Eagle, deputy principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, who said in a response, "I believe the Almighty has gotten us together this day ... for the purpose of reconciling his people. And when I say his people, that doesn't leave anybody out, regardless of your color or your heritage. When you say God's people, that includes everyone.

"The citizens of Russellville have asked the Cherokee to forgive them and their forefathers of the sins against the Cherokees during The Trail of Tears," noted Eagle, a deacon of Cherokee Nation Baptist Church, Tahlequah, Okla. "God has said in his Word that if we confess our sins, he's faithful to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"With that, Brother Wayne, I believe that when we confess, God forgives," Eagle continued. "God has also said that if we forgive those who have sinned against us, that God will also forgive us (Matthew 6:14). Based on God's Word, I, as second chief of the Cherokees, ... I forgive you and your forefathers and pray that God will continue to work with his people on reconciliation on all people from this day."

Following his acceptance, Eagle embraced Drain in front a standing ovation from a crowd of 500-plus participants. Eagle said following the ceremony that the moment "was very, very moving for me. I'm a very emotional person. Sometimes I have to rely on the Lord to bring out the words in my heart."

Bob Hettinga, a member of First Baptist Church in Russellville, said the ceremony "was touching because of the very fact of years and years of inattention" to Anglo abuses of Native Americans.

"I was particularly moved by the asking for and giving of forgiveness," Hettinga said. "It's a picture to me of what it must be when we approach God and he forgives us our sins."

Reflecting on the day's events, he added, "When the need for repentance is brought to our minds, we go to ... God and he gives us the message of reconciliation."

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Reported by Russell N. Dilday.

**Texas community rallies  
to help burned churches**

**By Ken Camp**

**Baptist Press  
6/21/96**

DALLAS (BP)--Christians in a northeast Texas community came together for a joint worship service focused on peace and unity within a week after two African American churches were burned.

The two church fires in Greenville, Texas, June 9-10 are among nearly 40 fires at predominantly black churches mostly in the South in the past 18 months.

Texas Baptist leaders, meanwhile, have joined Southern Baptists nationwide in denouncing the burning of African American churches and pledging to help the congregations rebuild.

"That this violence to black churches clearly violates the message of Scripture and the spirit of Christian love is beyond question," Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, said. "Texas Baptists will draw upon every resource to respond to anti-Christian acts of hatred."

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans collected a special offering June 12 to help all the churches rebuild -- giving and pledging more than \$281,000 -- and they passed a resolution denouncing racially motivated church fires.

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A fund has been established by Southern Baptist Convention officials to assist African American churches whose facilities have been destroyed by arson. Churches are encouraged to send their gifts, marked "Arson Fund," through the regular channel to state convention offices. In Texas, contributions should be sent to the Treasurer's Office, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, TX 75246-1798.

Contributions from other than Southern Baptist churches, marked "Arson Fund," can be sent to the SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce St., Nashville, TN 37203.

James Semple, chairman of Texas Baptists' statewide disaster relief committee, said of the church fires, "We deplore this cowardly act of attempting to destroy houses of worship. While buildings can be destroyed, churches cannot, and we pray that they will come back with ministries stronger than ever."

Both Semple and Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men, noted volunteer Texas Baptist builders are ready to help the fire-damaged churches rebuild. More than two decades ago, Texas Baptist volunteers joined black Baptists in rebuilding African American churches in the Texarkana area that had been firebombed.

Roughly half of the approximately 400 churches built by Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders have been predominantly black or Hispanic, Dixon noted.

Those wishing to be part of volunteer construction crews are encouraged to contact the SBC Brotherhood Commission at 1-800-280-1891.

In Greenville, Woman's Missionary Union volunteers from local churches joined their neighbors in staffing seven phone lines set up at the Chamber of Commerce to handle offers of manpower and money to help the burned churches rebuild.

As more than 3,500 people of all races gathered Sunday evening, June 16, for worship at Greenville's high school football stadium, keynote speaker Tony Evans urged them to "place race under the cross."

Local ministers organized the community-wide service following a series of suspicious fires, including the burning of the two predominantly black churches, and other apparently race-related vandalism in Greenville.

Southern Baptist chaplain Melvin Ray, director of pastoral care at Presbyterian Hospital of Greenville, helped to bring together the black, white and Hispanic pastors who planned the "new beginning" service.

Ray said the group wanted to "dismantle the walls of separation and with those very stones build bridges of reconciliation. Upon the foundation we all agree to cooperate in raising a new edifice of encouragement, held together with the mortar of mutual respect, understanding and love."

Racism is just a "crack in the wall," and society needs to look at the root problem -- a shifting moral foundation, according to Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas.

Evans, who presented a \$3,000 check from his congregation for the fund to help rebuild burned-out churches, said that the social structure is suffering from "spiritual AIDS."

"God has placed an immune system in the culture, and it is the church," said Evans, a popular speaker at the multiracial Promise Keepers rallies. "The tragedy is that the immune system has been weakened."

God's people must be salt and light, dispelling darkness and preserving what is good, Evans said.

"Men don't need to hear more 'we are one' talk," he said. "They need to see more 'we are one' walk."

Gov. George W. Bush commended people of faith in Greenville who sought to bring about healing, and he denounced racist arsonists and vandals.

"Texas is a big state, but it has no room for cowardice, hatred and bigotry," Bush said.

While thanking the political figures and civic leaders who attended the service, Harold Jones, pastor of Greenville's predominantly African American New Jerusalem Baptist Church, stressed the meeting's spiritual dimension.

"This is not a political rally. This is not a social gathering. This is a gathering of the saints of God -- black, white, Hispanic, Asian and otherwise," Jones said.

"The fires didn't bring Greenville together," he continued. "God already brought Greenville together. All the fires have done is bring us closer together. The fires were a spiritual attack on what God is doing here."

Shortly after the church fires, representatives of the New Black Panther party and the Nation of Islam came to Greenville urging local blacks to form armed citizen street patrols. Two Ku Klux Klan groups also sought permits to hold public demonstrations in the city.

But Houston McLendon, pastor of Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church, a predominantly black congregation in Greenville, reminded worshipers about the Old Testament story of Nehemiah leading God's people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. The task of believers is to rebuild, not be distracted by outside forces, he said.

"I want the world to know, I want Ku Klux Klan to know, I want the Black Panthers to know, I'm not coming off the wall," McLendon said. "No hatred group will come into Greenville and make Greenville a racial battleground. This is our home."

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#### Church's backyard yields ministry opportunity

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

Baptist Press  
6/21/96

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A ministry opportunity had been just beyond the back fence for a quarter of a century, but it took a home mission study and prayer experience for Beechwood Baptist Church to see it, according to Woman's Missionary Union director Minnie Harriman.

"It's been there forever," the 81-year-old Harriman said of the 170-unit Stonehenge Condominium Complex, which literally abuts Beechwood's property in east Louisville, Ky. Actually, the complex is about 25 years old.

But even though 15 Stonehenge residents are active members at Beechwood Baptist, the church "had never looked at the real potential for ministry there," Harriman said.

Then came the 1996 Southern Baptist home mission study featuring chaplaincy and the annual week of prayer for home missions focusing on multi-housing ministries.

For the mission study, Harriman decided to depart from the church's tradition of having a guest speaker. Instead, she enlisted 10 men from the church to role play 10 types of chaplains. "It went over real well," she said.

A few weeks later, when Beechwood participated in the annual week of prayer for home missions, someone suggested the church could do more than just study and pray -- they could get involved next door.

"I'm not sure who thought of it first," Harriman said, "but we had a ministry opportunity right under our noses."

The mission emphasis, she said, made the church aware of a need which "almost yelled, 'Why haven't you done it before?'"

Harriman encouraged interim pastor Robert Blackburn to write a letter to the condominium council, offering his services as a volunteer chaplain.

The complex "gladly welcomed this and thought it a very good idea," Blackburn said.

And although in the two months since, Blackburn has not been called on for counsel, several residents who previously had not attended the church have come to Wednesday night supper and Bible study.

Plans for singalongs, game nights and picnics are in the works.

"We're off and running," Harriman said. "Of course, we don't know what the potential will be ... but we couldn't pass this up." After all, it is right next door.

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Church's 'parish nurse'  
aids body, mind & spirit

By Todd Deaton

GREER, S.C. (BP)--"What is my ministry?"

That question haunted Nadine Bridwell as she progressed at Fairview Baptist Church, Greer, S.C., through "Experiencing God," a Bible study that encourages participants in knowing and doing God's will for their lives.

At the time, Bridwell was approaching retirement from the nursing faculty of Greenville Technical College. She heard about a parish nurse ministry that was started with several nurses at a congregation in the Midwest, and a similar program is being developed in upstate South Carolina by St. Francis Health Systems.

"This was my ministry," Bridwell concluded.

After consultation and prayer with her pastor, Lonnie Shull, a parish nurse ministry was launched at Fairview Baptist.

As a nurse practitioner, with the help of resources from St. Francis, Bridwell now leads the first parish nurse program in a Baptist church in that part of the state.

"The parish nurse program seeks to strengthen existing ministries to the whole person," Bridwell explained. "It is based on the fact that people don't have just physical problems. A person is made up of body, mind and spirit, and each part is affected when a person becomes ill.

"How a person deals with an illness is tied in with that person's faith," she said.

"As a parish nurse, Bridwell plays several roles," Shull noted. "As a health educator, she helps congregation members understand about illness and how to live healthier lives. As a health counselor, she helps a person deal with specific problems. As a facilitator and resource person, she identifies needs and points members to organizations or health services. As a referral source, she helps new church members know which physicians are taking new patients and where to go to get health needs met."

"A parish nurse does not duplicate health care. She does hands-on nursing," Bridwell added. "The parish nurse serves as a bridge between the congregation and community health services in the context of spiritual ministry and pastoral care."

Some of the ministry's benefits to a congregation and its community include educational programs, blood pressure screening and medication counseling.

Should a person need to talk to someone in confidence about health concerns, the parish nurse is available to provide information and literature about specific diseases.

"The parish nurse is seen as a part of the caring ministry of Fairview Baptist Church," Shull said. The program is offered to all church members and to the community on Wednesdays between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Bridwell also is available to serve as a consultant to other churches interested in beginning a parish nurse program.

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