



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

---FEATURES

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November 29, 1966

Houston Church May Send
First Moon Missionaries

By John J. Hurt
For the Baptist Press

HOUSTON (BP)--The Nassau Bay Baptist Church may someday claim the distinction of sending the first missionaries to the moon.

Two of the church's members, Major William Pogue of the Air Force and Captain Jack Lousma of the Marines, are training for the Apollo moon mission at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration near here.

Another Nassau Bay Baptist Church member, Dr. Fred Kelly of the N.A.S.A. medical staff, would like nothing better than to be the one selected as the scientist for an Apollo flight.

Pogue and Lousma came in with the last group of astronauts to train for the Apollo mission, and there is some chance they may be picked to make one of the moon trips.

But even if they are not the first Baptist missionaries to the moon, they and the other members of the church are as determined to establish new church missions as they are in their space missions.

Although the 450-member church is less than three years old, it is already planning to establish two missions and is entering a newly-constructed building that already is too small.

Everything about the Nassau Bay Baptist Church, including its pastor, is unique. Approximately 80 per cent of the men of the church are connected in some way with the manned space craft center nearby.

The church's amazing growth can be assigned easily to the fact that the members who spend five and six days a week in the fantastics of space have the same imagination about a church program.

Pogue is associate Sunday School superintendent, and next October will be elevated to Sunday School superintendent. His wife teaches in the church's beginner department of Sunday School. Both grew up in Southern Baptist churches in Oklahoma, and he is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee.

Lousma is superintendent of the Sunday School's high school department, and his wife is associate superintendent. Both are from Michigan, where they were active in an independent church.

In addition to the two astronauts, several of the church's other top leaders are connected with the manned space craft center just a stone's throw from the church.

For example, Forrest Malone, chairman of the deacons, is chief in a computer division with N.A.S.A.; John Harris, superintendent of the college-career Sunday School department, is an executive in the Lunar Lab division; and Bill Taylor, treasurer, is working with the vacuum chamber program.

Like many of the church's members, the pastor, W. H. Rittenhouse, is unique both in background and ministry.

He earned a pre-medical degree at Stetson University (Baptist), DeLand, Fla., just before World War II when he became a bomber pilot. He was shot down over Rumania on his 26th mission and imprisoned.

The son of a Baptist minister in Georgia, Rittenhouse found his Christian faith the one thing which kept him alive during the year in a German prison. He began his ministry there by witnessing to others in the camp, and resolved to return to Rumania as a missionary.

After the war, he earned his master's degree at the University of North Carolina and his doctor of philosophy degree at Duke, majoring in mathematics with special study in the divinity school. The math was to qualify him as a teacher to enter Rumania, but the Communist country never granted permission.

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Now, the math and pre-med, plus his experience as a pilot, give him a special background and vocabulary for both counseling and witnessing in the space center.

The brief history of the church reads like something out of a fairy tale. Started only three years ago, the church now has 450 members, an average Sunday School attendance of 357, Training Union attendance of 117, and a budget of more than \$100,000.

During its first year of full-time ministry, the church baptized 52 persons and now, two months later, has 48 awaiting baptism in the \$300,000 building it will occupy in December

It began in December of 1963 as a mission of El Largo Baptist Church in Houston, meeting first in homes. Then it moved into a vacated house in the rear of a gasoline station. Al Novak, a retired minister, served as the church's first part-time pastor. The church was not organized until February of 1965, and six months later Novak challenged the church to seek a full-time pastor.

Rittenhouse, having served churches in Miami and Atlanta, quit evangelistic work to become its pastor in October of 1965.

In his first year as pastor, Rittenhouse has not only led the church in baptizing 52 converts and new members, but also has led in building a new \$300,000 modern-architecture building, to be occupied for the first time on Dec. 11, 1966.

The chapel, contemporary in design, will accommodate about 450 persons. Educational facilities have been provided for about the same number. Already the first unit is too small to accommodate the church, and plans are being made for a second building program next year.

Rittenhouse said that although the congregation is high in education, position, and all other respects, there is no thought of preaching any different than in the normal pastorate. "My people made it very plain they want to hear something to help them spiritually," he said. His evangelistic ministry continues in the pastorate.

Leadership is not the problem it is in most churches, he said. The members have the educational background, and the pastor says they are dedicated. The average age is probably the mid-30's; their income in five figures; nearly all have college degrees; and many have done graduate work.

The men who program far ahead into the future for space missions, devote the same enthusiasm to planning church missions.

The church has an option on six acres in Clear Lake City, another area near the N.A.S.A. headquarters, and they are planning a chapel there within the year. Others are to follow.

An area that three years ago was open space will soon have a population of 30,000 as a suburb of Houston, and the Baptist church which may have one of its members as a man on the moon has "all systems go" for making the area a Baptist center.

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John J. Hurt is editor of the Baptist Standard, weekly newsmagazine of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

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BP PHOTO to be mailed to state Baptist papers, available to others on request.



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November 29, 1966

SBC Seminary Enrollments
Increase Slightly in '66

NASHVILLE (BP)--Enrollments at six Southern Baptist Convention theological seminaries this fall varied only slightly from enrollments reported last fall, a comparison of statistics released by the SBC Education Commission here has disclosed.

The number of full-time, regular students at the six seminaries increased by 19 over the number reported last fall, the report indicated.

Total number of regular students (net enrollment) at the six seminaries was set at 4,088, compared to a net enrollment last fall of 4,069 at the six seminaries.

The SBC Education Commission compiled the statistics on the basis of official reports sent to their Nashville office from the registrars of the six seminaries.

Three of the seminaries reported enrollment increases, while three other seminaries reported decreases, comparing fall enrollments for 1966 and 1965.

Enrollments were up at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.; the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, La.

Decreases in enrollments were reported by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex.; and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

Biggest increase, both numerically and in percentage, was reported by Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, with 42 more students this fall than last. Enrollment jumped from 150 last fall to 192 this year, an increase of 21.4 per cent.

Southern Seminary in Louisville noted an increase of 38 regular students, with 916 reported this year and 878 last fall. Southern Seminary also reported 72 "other" students enrolled in non-credit courses, such as its evening school.

New Orleans Seminary enrollment increased by 18 students compared to last fall's enrollment, with 697 full-time students reported this year and 679 last fall.

The biggest of the six SBC seminaries, Southwestern in Fort Worth, reported a total of 1,560 regular students this year compared to 1,590 last fall, a decrease of 30.

Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest listed 484 students, down 32 from last fall's enrollment of 516.

Golden Gate Seminary near San Francisco reported 239 enrolled, compared to 256 last fall, a drop of 17 students.

In addition, the SBC Education Commission gave an enrollment report for American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, which is jointly owned by the SBC and the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.

American Seminary, which operates a big correspondence and extension study program among Negro Baptist pastors, reported a total of 833 students, of which 784 are in the category of correspondence or extension students. Only 49 were enrolled as full-time students on the Nashville campus. Total enrollment dropped by 68 during the year, and net enrollment dropped by 12 students.

The statistical report also listed the number of graduates of the seminaries during the year, with a total of 1,090 graduates reported at the six SBC seminaries during 1966.

Listed number of graduates for each school were: Golden Gate, 61; Midwestern, 35; New Orleans, 180; Southeastern, 141; Southern, 276; and Southwestern, 397.

Southern Seminary was the only one of the six which reported more graduates during 1966 than in 1965, with 41 more graduates this year reported. The others graduated slightly fewer students during 1966.

Baptist Periodical
Index Published

NASHVILLE (BP)--A 363-page index of articles in 32 Southern Baptist Convention periodicals has been published by the Historical Commission of the SBC.

Entitled, "The Southern Baptist Periodical Index -- 1965," the comprehensive listing of articles in Baptist publications is the first volume of a continuing series, reports Davis C. Woolley, executive secretary of the SBC Historical Commission.

Another index of 1966 periodicals will be published by about April 15, 1967, Woolley said. A total of 33 SBC publications will be indexed in the 1966 volume.

More than 10,000 entries on general articles in the 32 Southern Baptist periodicals are included in the 1965 index. The articles are arranged by author and subjects in alphabetical order.

Woolley said that the project has been underway for several years, and was proposed when Norman W. Cox was executive secretary of the commission.

In 1965, the Dargan-Carver Library of the SBC completed a pilot project by indexing the Baptist Sunday School Board periodicals for the years 1962-1964.

Last year, the Coordinating Committee of the SBC Inter-Agency Council approved of the project and requested the Historical Commission to serve as the clearing house for the annual Southern Baptist periodical index.

Woolley said that the index will be of particular interest to scholars, students, research specialists, and writers, and that already more than 200 orders had been received for the 1965 Index.

CUTLINES with feature mailed 11/29/66

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

BAPTIST ASTRONAUTS: Two Baptist astronauts, flanking their pastor, could possibly become the first missionaries to the moon. Astronauts Bill Pogue (left) and Jack Lousma (right) chat with their pastor, Bill Rittenhouse of Nassau Bay Baptist Church near Houston, in front of the N.A.S.A. manned space craft center. Both Pogue and Lousma are active church workers, and are training for the Apollo moon mission. (BP PHOTO)

BAPTIST PRESS PHOTO

November 30, 1966

CUTLINES

NEW ARIZONA BAPTIST BUILDING: The Arizona Southern Baptist Convention has purchased this modern office building for its new headquarters, and will move to 400 West Camelback Road in Phoenix about January 1. The convention offices now are located at 315 West McDowell in Phoenix. The first floor of the building will continue to be leased to commercial firms, and the Baptist offices will be located on the third and second floors. The full convention voted to purchase the \$400,000-appraised building for \$375,000. (BP PHOTO)