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December 30, 1966

Baptists Face Tensions
In Nation's Capital Area

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists in the District of Columbia and in Maryland are making progress toward a solution to their conflict over establishing new churches in the area adjacent to the nation's capital city.

Information made available to Baptist Press identified the cause of tension between the Maryland Baptist Convention and the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. The cause of the trouble is reported to be "the presence in the area of two duplicating conventions who have not been wholly cooperative."

The report says that two major problems are the result of this conflict: (1) a weak Baptist witness in the area, and (2) the lack of a unified strategy for facing the missionary challenge of the District of Columbia and Maryland.

The conflict is not new. It goes back at least to 1924 when the two Baptist bodies agreed that "the territorial jurisdiction of the Maryland Baptist Union Association shall be the State of Maryland, and that of the Columbia Association shall be the District of Columbia."

However, with the population explosion of the District of Columbia since 1940 and the development of Washington suburbs, many new churches affiliated with the D. C. Convention were started in nearby Maryland. Some churches formerly located in the District of Columbia moved to Maryland suburbia.

For the District of Columbia Convention "the greatest decade in terms of growth was from 1950 to 1960 with a net gain of 19 churches," according to the report. "It was in this period that the convention organized 23 new churches and relocated seven old churches in Maryland," it continued.

At the present time 38 of the 60 churches in the District of Columbia Convention are located in suburban Maryland.

Current studies of future need for churches indicate that 50 new churches should be started by 1975 in the two Maryland counties adjacent to the District of Columbia.

Although the Maryland Convention is aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the District of Columbia Convention is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Convention, this was not identified as a major cause of conflict between the two groups. It is, however, one of the points of tension.

To try to resolve their conflicts both conventions in 1964 appointed committees which united to form the Strategy Planning Committee. For the past three years this committee has had frequent meetings and brought in an outside program analyst to make "in depth" studies and to recommend solutions.

Alvin West, a Washington attorney and former member of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, has served as chairman of the joint committee. Albert McClellan, program planning secretary for the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, has worked with the committee the past two years.

McClellan made a 126-page report to the committee last fall. He made a five-fold recommendation for the development of a unified Baptist strategy for the Washington metropolitan area. He proposed:

1. An identical by-law for each convention providing for a standing committee to meet twice a year to work on problems of new church locations and to suggest ways for cooperation between the two conventions;

(more)

2. Regular meetings of Baptist pastors' conferences in the areas of tensions;
3. Assignment of a staff person from the District of Columbia as a liaison with the superintendents of missions of the two Maryland associations involved;
4. The development of a joint program by the two conventions on the campus of the University of Maryland that is located near the District of Columbia; and
5. That merger of the two conventions is impractical at the present, but that the idea has enough merit that the possibility should be reviewed again in three or four years.

Shortly after the McClellan report was made, the Maryland committee considered his recommendations and made a counter proposal. It rejected the idea that merger of the two conventions is impractical and countered with a plan to merge the two conventions no later than 1970.

The Maryland proposal was that the new convention be singly aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and that the name be Maryland-District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

On the other hand, the District of Columbia Convention committee on December 8 reported substantial agreement with the plan proposed by McClellan, but with a "middle ground" proposal. The District of Columbia committee recognized merit in the merger idea but suggested that the joint committee report to the two conventions in 1970 "on the progress of studies and cooperative activities carried on in the intervening period."

The next meeting of the joint Strategy Planning Committee will be February 24.

The executive secretary of the Maryland Convention is Roy D. Gresham. The executive secretary of the District of Columbia Convention is M. Chandler Stith.

The District of Columbia lies along the Potomac river between Northern Virginia and Maryland. Most of the District is on the Maryland side of the river, but the development of suburbia has spilled over into both Maryland and Virginia.

The conflict about overlapping territory between Baptists in Virginia and those of the District of Columbia does not exist because of the natural barrier of the Potomac river and the adamant stand by Virginia Baptists from the beginning of the expansion era. Virginia Baptist leaders have always insisted that churches on the Virginia side of the Potomac be affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

The two Maryland counties involved in the controversy are Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties.

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Retired Preacher's
Service 'Invaluable'

12-30-66

BEAUMONT, TEX. (BP)--Don Covington, who retired as District Three missions secretary in Texas a year ago, has returned here after a year of service in Panama, exclaiming: "I wish we had come to Panama three years sooner."

Covington and his wife had entertained thoughts of "retiring" to work at the Cresta del Mar Baptist Assembly in Panama.

But the critical shortage of pastors in that country led Covington to volunteer to serve as pastor of the Baptist church in Almirante, a town of English-speaking West Indians in the rugged Bocas del Toro province.

The couple's service paid off.

Before their one-year stint was up, a permanent missionary couple, the Horace Fishers, moved in at Almirante.

The Covingtons then spent the last seven weeks as interim leadership at the Chagres River Baptist Church in Gamboa, Canal Zone, the Fishers' former location. That church, which has five missions served in part by students of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Panama, still is without a pastor.

"This was one of the most rewarding years of our life and one of the happiest of our ministry," Covington said.

(more)

He and Mrs. Covington plan to devote much of their time now to directing a campaign to raise \$400,000 for the Valley Baptist Academy in Harlingen, Tex.

L. D. Wood, former superintendent of Baptist missions in Panama and now assistant secretary of Language Missions for the Home Mission Board, praised the Covingtons' contribution as "invaluable."

He said two other retired pastors could be put right to work on an interim basis in Panama. Retired pastors are needed in areas of pioneer missions. The Southern Baptist Annuity Board permits service under certain conditions without relinquishing annuity payments.

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Indiana CEF Pushes Aid
For Parochial Pupils

12-30-66

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Advocates of state aid to both public and private school children will press their cause in 1967 in the Indiana General Assembly, according to a report from Alvin C. Shackelford, editor of the Indiana Baptist.

Sponsored by Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF), a predominantly Catholic organization, the School Children's Assistance Act of 1967 will be introduced in the state legislature in January, according to announced plans.

The bill, referred to as the Hoosier Junior G. I. Bill of Rights, would provide \$50 annually to each school child attending an "approved school" under the Indiana school laws. The checks would be made out to the parent or guardian of the school child, but could be honored only by endorsement by an official of the school attended.

Cost of the program is estimated to be \$7½ million annually.

A similar proposal was made to the 1965 Indiana General Assembly. The new proposal indicates a renewed emphasis by CEF. During the election campaign in 1966 CEF questioned all legislative candidates and endorsed those who were for the proposed assistance act.

The Evansville Press reported that this "CEF slate" was distributed at a number of Catholic and Lutheran churches on the Sunday prior to the election.

A last-minute attempt by Baptists in the Evansville area, according to Shackelford, was unsuccessful in blocking election of the CEF-supported candidates.

Shackelford reports that this so-call "Hoosier Junior G. I. Bill" is one of several attempts planned this legislative session to secure tax funds for parochial and private schools. "Money for textbooks, lunches, and school bus transportation will also be sought in other bills prepared for the General Assembly," he said.

The continuing CEF campaign is reported to be using a ten-point recommended procedure such as writing legislators, asking their support and publishing their replies, cultivating the "political power structure in your community," buying a \$50 membership, and to "actively help to elect qualified legislative candidates who support our CEF program."

Advocates of state aid directly to school children contend that this avoids "any contravention or limitation, either directly or indirectly, of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of any individual in matters of education."

CEF has sponsored similar legislative and political activity in several states and in the United States Congress. Its announced aim is to pursue its course throughout the nation until it gets tax aid for children attending private schools as well as public schools.

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Dallas College Given
Gift Of \$436,000

DALLAS, TEX. (BP)--Dallas Baptist College has received a gift of \$436,000--the largest since the college moved to Dallas in the fall of 1965.

Delmo L. Johnson, Sr., chairman of the development committee of the Board of Trustees, said the gift, presented to the college by donors who wish to remain anonymous, will be applied to the overall development program of the college and will permit construction to begin in January on the college's physical education building.

The building is scheduled for completion in the fall of 1967. It will include both athletic and auditorium facilities.

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Hall Enshrines
Baptist Pastor

12-30-66

DALLAS, TEX. (BP)--Robert Jackson Robinson, termed "a native son who traded a basketball for a Bible and has been successful in using both," has been enshrined in the Texas Sports Hall of Fame.

In ceremonies here Dec. 30 the name of the pastor of the 3,600-member First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., was joined to a roll of 55 other athletes and coaches who have been outstanding in their fields.

Robinson led Baylor University, Baptist school at Waco, to win the Southwest Conference Crown in 1946 and became an All-American.

"This was a thrill," Robinson told a Fort Worth writer, "but possibly the biggest thrill of my career was climbing the pedestal and getting the gold medal in the 1948 Olympics."

A graduate of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, the noted athlete went straight to his present pastorate where he has been 14 years.

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