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Law and Order Called  
Issue Of Church Concern

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By Dallas Lee

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Despite law-and-order sloganeering this year, court dockets are jammed even deeper in confusion, parole and probation caseloads are swelled even further beyond capacity, and Christian correction officers and chaplains are as frustrated as ever in their plea for church involvement.

This conclusion stood out in a three-day Conference on Church and Crime at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here, the first such conference of its kind in the Southern Baptist Convention.

One parole officer among the 50 or so conferees said:

"The biggest frustration is not in working with offenders but in trying to involve church people. Most prisoners have been exposed to a religion they do not care for and are convinced does not care for them."

Underlining the need for Christian involvement, former convict Larry Baulch, who now is director of Yokefellow Prison Ministries, said in regard to his three terms in San Quentin Prison:

"Each time I was released I was sure I would never come back. But I hadn't gained anything in prison but an education in crime. Certainly I received no understanding of my behavior. I was just pressured deeper into criminal conformity."

Speakers and discussion leaders repeatedly emphasized that the basic emotional problems of most criminals are of such a nature that the patient influence of a Christian friend could make a radical difference.

Common denominators identified during the conference describing characteristics of most prisoners included: no healthy relationship with an adequate adult; no self-respect and a heavy sense of failure; pressure to conform while in prison to a "warped image" of criminals who consider themselves "good guys"; and an intense anxiety over separation from spouses.

"About 85 per cent of the prisoners in the nation suffer from a character disorder--a lack of impulse control," said Municipal Judge Keith Leenhouts of Royal Oak, Mich.

"There is nothing between the impulse and the action, so what do you do? You insert an inspirational personality. When God knew we couldn't understand love and redemption in the laws and the prophets, he wrapped it up in the person of Christ. The love and concern of inspirational personalities is not 'an' answer, it is 'the' answer," he declared.

Judge Leenhouts said the nation's lower courts (which handle misdemeanors or less serious crimes) are not equipped even for good presentence investigation, much less rehabilitation services. Neither are most prison systems.

"The only answer is to appeal to citizens to be inspirational personalities in the lives of young offenders and to work with men as volunteer parole or probation officers," Leenhouts said.

Professional caseworkers could do the job, he said, but there are neither enough professionals nor enough money.

Speaking as a Methodist layman, the judge said:

"We won't buy our way out of the crime problem in this society, not even in America. A ticket to Hawaii won't do it. We've got to quit looking down our holier-than-thou noses at criminals and get involved ourselves."

Leenhouts himself initiated a program in Royal Oak called Project Misdemeanant, in which some 500 community volunteers help with pre-sentence investigation work, counsel prisoners, and serve as "inspirational personalities" in the lives of young offenders. It is now part of a national program being promoted by the United Methodist Church.

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Leenhouts launched Project Misdemeanant by calling together eight community "experts"-- a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a pastor, a social worker and high school counselors and teachers.

This beginning group helped counsel and investigate cases on a voluntary basis, and soon--without efforts at recruiting--the list of volunteers had swelled to 500, including many retirees who help with pre-sentencing investigative work.

"We wanted to be able to know something about a defendant before sentencing him" the judge said. "We want to be able to overcome the bad and build on the good."

Another phase of Project Misdemeanant is a work detail program under which young first-time offenders can be released to a weekend work detail rather than confinement and no criminal record results.

"In any of these efforts, we aim to take a person who is at his lowest point of dignity and pride and self respect and have him walk out six days or six months later with his head up, feeling dignity, pride and self respect," Leenhouts said.

Former convict Baulch repeatedly emphasized the need for a proper attitude when approaching a prisoner.

"The tendency," he said, "is to treat these people as things rather than as priceless individuals. We ought to approach people with the expectation that they may have something for us, that there is a mutuality.

"Too often people in the church are out to win souls--to make converts--with no recognition of the transcendent opportunity of mutuality," he observed.

There also was strong emphasis from professionals in the conference on the need for an organized Christian lobby to influence legislation involving correctional institutions and procedures.

Florida State University Criminologist Vernon Fox said often more concern is shown for the correctional institution itself than for the prisoners, adding:

"Where would a hospital administrator be if he showed more concern for his institution than for his patients?"

Fox also declared that a vast majority of those now imprisoned could be supervised and rehabilitated more effectively in community centers than in central prisons. He said such approaches, in which "residents" could work on the outside and live under close supervision, would reduce the number of repeaters and free money for rehabilitation.

He also said parole systems need to be restudied and improved. "As it is now," he said, "we take the best risks and put them out on parole with close supervision, and leave the hardest toughest criminal to stay to the end of his sentence and then be released without any supervision."

This first-of-its-kind meeting, officially called the Conference on the Church, Crime, Offenders, and Families, was sponsored by the youth and family services of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. About 50 Brotherhood and Woman's Missionary Union workers, rehabilitation professionals, pastors and superintendents of missions participated.

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Missouri Baptists Set Federal  
Aid Policy, Crisis Statement

(11-1-68)

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (BP)--The Missouri Baptist Convention meeting here adopted a four-point policy statement regarding federal aid to its institutions, and approved the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in the Nation" adopted earlier this year by the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston.

In a meeting marked by unity and only routine debate, the convention also passed a record 1969 budget, activated a new division of higher education to coordinate the convention's program of higher education, and re-elected its incumbent officers.

The four-point policy statement concerning federal aid to its institutions did not differ greatly from the present policy of the convention, reported the education study committee which recommended adoption of the policy;

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The statement denies outright federal grants to Baptist institutions and stated that any attempt by one of its institutions to receive such grants would be "grounds for bringing under review the relationship between the institution involved and the Missouri Baptist Convention."

On the matter of government loans, the policy encourages college trustees to negotiate loans "at the most favorable interest rates available from (either) private or public sources if the boards believe the rates charged by a public agency will service a loan without subsidy from tax funds."

Other points of the policy "encourages colleges to establish procedures compatible with Baptist beliefs" concerning grants or loans to individual students, and "encourages colleges to engage in mutually beneficial research or service projects on contract with public agencies" provided public funds do not exceed actual costs.

The Missouri Baptist Convention Executive Board recommended that the convention approve the statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention last June concerning "The Crisis in our Nation."

The lengthy statement, among other things, declared commitment to obtain equal human and legal rights for all people, refusal to be a part of racism, and acceptance of every Christian, regardless of race, as a brother welcome in church fellowship.

It was pointed out that "the Missouri Baptist Convention has been promoting through the years a racial ministry which equals or goes beyond the suggestions in the Southern Baptist Convention statement."

The Missouri Convention further called upon "churches and associations in Missouri to intensify their efforts for a program of concerted Christian action to meet the spiritual needs of all mankind."

Adopting a record budget, the convention set a Cooperative Program goal of \$3.6 million for 1969, an increase of about \$100,000. Of the total, 35 per cent will go to Southern Baptist world mission causes, 10 per cent to special denominational causes, and 55 per cent to state mission causes. In addition, a total goal of \$1.75 million was approved for three special state, national and foreign mission offerings in Missouri churches.

In another major action, the convention voted to activate a division of higher education of its Executive Board, with a consultant retained to advise in further development of a coordinated program of higher education for Missouri Baptists.

Re-elected president of the convention was Thomas S. Field, pastor of First Baptist Church in Springfield, Mo., who warned in his presidential address that Missouri Baptist churches are in danger of sleeping through a revolution.

He called for churches to "confront a revolutionary world with a revolution of their own--a revolution in the realm of personality when a man becomes a new creature in Christ."

Field identified what he called a "two-fold crisis" with, on one hand, "a rank heresy that confines God to the obituary columns or completely secularizes the Christian message or reduces it to a hollow social effort," or, on the other hand, a "soul-chilling brand of orthodoxy which seldom demonstrates in orthopraxy."

He called for leadership in the churches to serve as a prophetic voice to quicken society's conscience and the churches' commitment to their own unique ministry of giving good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The convention will hold its 1969 meeting in Cape Girardeau, Mo., Oct. 29-30.



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