

(BP)---FEATURES

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Where The Action Was
So Were Baptist Students

by Adon Taft*

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (BP)--This is where the action was for 30,000 college students during their Easter vacation again this year. But this time there was a Baptist witness among them.

In fact, a group of Baptists from the Wichita (Kan.) State University and 450 other Christians from 50 colleges in 19 states and Canada provided most of the action for the two-week gathering which has become the "in" ritual for campus status-seekers.

It was a pilot project for Baptists who "have been confined to the church and have not been out in the market place," explained Ray Gilliland, student director for the metropolitan New York area and former state student director for the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists. He organized the "Pilgrim 20" group from Wichita, which was one of the major attractions on the Fort Lauderdale beach.

"Pilgrim 20" is a group of folk and rock singers whose objective is to put across the message of Christianity through a medium today's teenagers understand. The seven boys and three girls have toured the nation's campuses and churches for the past 18 months "doing their thing." Four of them double as instrumentalists.

Along with "The Exkursions," a "hard rock" band from Chicago which works with the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, the "Pilgrim 20" group did most of the entertaining for one week from the city recreation department's bandstand during the afternoons and from the "Hunger Hanger" at night.

"We came with apprehension," admitted Gilliland. "And we were greatly surprised that the kids stayed through the whole program, testimonies and all!"

Concurring was Colleen Spence, a senior English major from Omaha, Neb., who is one of the two original members left with "Pilgrim 20." "I expected the big crowds drawn by the music to melt away when we started to talk," she said, "but they didn't."

As many as 1,000 of the students would gather around whenever the music blared through the amplifiers. "They were very open and frank," observed Bob Hughes, a senior psychology major who is the other veteran of the ensemble.

"They were interested in discussing anything. And the straighter we would tell it, the more intently they would listen," he said.

There was no preaching, emphasized Bill York, an Inter-Varsity executive from Richmond, Va., who was in charge of daily class sessions to train the Christian kids how to be effective witnesses. They met from 9:00 a.m. to noon each day in the Sheraton Hotel for prayer, Bible study, reports on experiences and discussion of techniques.

The young people just told what Christ has meant to them in their own lives and then answered questions from the audience in the mass meetings, or struck up personal conversations on an individual or small group basis.

The 150 students from the Campus Crusade for Christ used that organization's spiritual survey as an approach to the kids on the beach.

Mike Johnson, of "The Exkursions," told his story in a song called "Would You Believe?" He was a dope addict whose life was changed by a personal, spiritual encounter with Christ.

The music itself dispelled many preconceived ideas about Christ and Christians because it was not at all "churchy." But with the rock beat there was always the message--a message to which the students really listened, to the surprise of Sally Giles, a junior in speech pathology who is a member of "Pilgrim 20" (so-called because the singers think of themselves of pilgrims in the 20th century).

"When we give a concert on a campus, the kids always come up and say 'the music was great,'" she noted. "But here, they said 'I dig what you say!'"

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Sally added that "they respect us for being here because most people don't take time to be interested in other people anymore."

The fact that fewer than 50 persons had made definite commitments of their lives to Christ as personal Savior did not dismay the Christian students who spent their afternoons in dialogues on sign-announced subjects under marked Inter-Varsity beach umbrellas, and engaged in personal witnessing conversations until 12:30 or 1:00 a.m. each night.

"The key thing is not that everybody signs a card," explained Bob, "but that a bug is planted that they can't get rid of when they go back to school."

"These are beautiful people," added Colleen, "But they just aren't directed yet. Then they see how we love Christ and have made him the center of our lives."

Gilliland, who now is working with students in New York City, was impressed at the way his group was able to communicate through its music and was "delighted with the response. There was an excellent reaction. There were no negative comments."

Howard Harrison, a Wichita business executive who has financed much of the "Pilgrim 20" project, said, "it was a real great experience for me. I had been concerned about coming. I figured the kids on the beach would either ignore me or push me around."

To his surprise, he found that the kids "were basically good and would talk to an adult if the adult was in with a group of kids. I was accepted by the kids in our own group, so I was accepted by the rest of them."

Harrison also is convinced that "we could learn a lot from these kids about reaching the unchurched. They knew they could communicate and they did. I think we in the church should spend money for missions right here in places like this if we're going to reach people outside the church."

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*Adon Taft is religion editor for the Herald in Miami, Florida

Eugene White Named Editor
Of Charity and Children

(4-16-69)

THOMASVILLE, N.C. (BP)--J. Eugene White, managing editor of the Church and State, monthly periodical of the Americans United for Separation of Church and State organization, has been chosen as the new editor of Charity and Children, according to W. R. Wagoner, president of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc.

White, age 43, is a native of Texas. He will become the seventh editor of the Charity and Children, weekly publication of the Children's Homes, since its inception in 1887.

Eugene W. Baker, director of public relations of the Children's Homes, has served as interim editor of the paper since last August.

White, an ordained minister, has served in his present position since October, 1964. Prior to assuming this position, he was an editorial assistant with the Baptist Standard, state publication of Texas Baptists.

A graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, with a bachelor of science degree in chemistry, White also holds the bachelor of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex.

"We are pleased to have secured the services of J. Eugene White," said Wagoner. "He comes to his new position with an excellent background of training and experience in religious journalism. We envision for him a fruitful ministry with the Baptist Children's Homes."

White is the author of Drama of the Cross, a book published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., and several pamphlets.

White will assume duties as the editor of Charity and Children May 5.

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C O R R E C T I O N

(4-16-69)

On BP story mailed 4-15-69, headlined "Letters, Editorials Protest Professors' Book Resolution," please change the name on page 2, graph 4 to be Harold (not Howard) McManus of Mercer....

Thanks, Baptist Press



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