



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

REGIONAL OFFICES

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Editor, 1350 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Editor, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) RI 1-1996
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Editor, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

BUREAU

BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203,
Telephone (615) 254-1631

May 16, 1969

Concern Expressed For Lack
Of Inner City Ministries

ATLANTA (BP)--A sense of urgency in grasping the nature of the problems of the inner city, and ways to respond effectively dominated the sessions of a Southern Baptist consultation on the inner city here.

Even those churchmen conscientiously attempting to cope with the awesomeness of the city core seem haunted with what one Southern Baptist government worker expressed as "the fear that what we do will be "too little, too late, too lily-white."

At the consultation sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's metropolitan missions department, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Professor Finley Edge of Louisville nailed down the point:

"The church as we know it can die. We are in indefinite danger going on in our typical Southern leisurely fashion, thinking we have time to change, unaware that a fire is burning at the roots of our institutions."

The fire that downtown and inner-city churches cannot ignore, of course, is the one raging in the heart of the black man. Racial prejudice--both subtle and overt--was dealt with a major stumbling block during the four-day conference, and the subject surfaced in one small group discussion at its most potent point--the matter of interracial courtship and marriage.

"The race issue is still the most divisive issue in Southern Baptist life and in the life of the nation," said Foy Valentine of the SBC Christian Life Commission.

"Slavery--a hell-born institution--is behind our struggle in 1969. White racism is interwoven like a defective gene in society in the church. You run into 'nigger jokes' in casual conversation, in business meetings. At evangelism conferences, from best friends--everywhere."

If Southern Baptists react neurotically toward the race issue, it is understandable, Valentine said.

"Negro slavery is not just a blot on our history, it is our reason for being. We have got to recognize it, repent of it and then bring forth fruit worthy of repentance."

Victor Glass, of the Home Mission Board's department of work with National Baptists, followed up this assertion, stating:

"The church lost the spiritual power to confront the race issue when it teamed up with a colonial power structure to say freedom didn't accompany baptism.

"Still today the church is one of the most segregated institutions in American life."

Knoxville Pastor Lewis Rhodes stated that the black church is the only Christian institution with integrity, "Because it has been both a religious and a political base."

"The fact that Negroes are not flocking to our white churches is to their credit," Rhodes said. "We are going to have to hurt awhile being rejected."

Commenting on the fear of some pastors to speak prophetically about the race issue, Rhodes said:

"If a man would be fired for saying what he ought to say, it means he has been hired to say what people want to hear." Later in his message, he added: "It is better for a church to be divided over the right issues than united over the wrong issue."

Edge, who leads periodic church renewal conferences at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said renewal of local churches is possible, but not automatic, "The local churches with our present forms and structures can die," he said, adding: "The church is in danger of committing suicide."

"Change, renewal must come, not to save ourselves, but to be faithful to God, to be a redemptive people who love and give of themselves," he said.

Edge said the church faces an organizational crisis because its structures are "come" structures. "We say, come to us and we will do you good, come to our meetings,"

Baptists must recognize, he said, that the masses of people do not and cannot be expected to come to church---"if we have a word, it must be given where people are in the world."

No organizational changes or new structures will make a difference, however, without personal commitment from church members, Edge said.

"The decent, respectable, nonchalant, uncommitted church member will not be able to accomplish anything," he said.

"We must overcome the problem of superficiality. Too many church members have a superficial encounter with God, a superficial commitment, a superficial awareness of what they are supposed to be, a superficial understanding of the mission of the church."

Fort Worth Pastor J. P. Allen stated emphatically that the responsibility lay with local congregations not only for renewal but for ministry.

"It is a sin," he said, "to let the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board do work where Christians live."

Allen said the story of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth where he is pastor is the story of one congregation's "disentanglement with its doors" in a multiracial community.

Our ministry, Allen suggested, was a charm school for girls, "which helps them see what they really are." Allen cited how the talents of people in the congregation were utilized in medical and dental clinics and in other ministries.

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Retired Ridgecrest Manager
To Work at Glorieta This Year

5/16/69

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Willard K. Weeks who retired as manager of Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Assembly two years ago has accepted the position of manager for the Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Assembly gift shop for this year.

Weeks worked at the American Baptist Assembly at Green Lake Wis., following his retirement after 17 years as manager of Ridgecrest.

Known by guests and former staffers at Ridgecrest as "Dad," Weeks was a summer "father" over the years to almost 7,000 staff members.

Weeks and his wife, the former Zelma McKim, will run the gift shop for the first year that the assembly has operated it. Previously, the shop was leased to a private concern.

He went to Ridgecrest in 1950 from Houston, Texas, where he had served as pastor's associate for five years at Second Baptist Church. While in Houston he also served as president of the Texas Baptist Encampment at Palacios, Tex.

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Stassen To Headline
Laymen's Congress

5/16/69

NASHVILLE (BP)--Former Minnesota Governor and Presidential Candidate Harold Stassen will be among the headline speakers for the Baptist Men's Congress on Evangelism and Lay Involvement slated here July 3-5.

Owen Cooper of Yazoo City Miss., president of the Pan American Union of Baptist Men which is sponsoring the meeting, announced Stassen's acceptance on the program. Cooper is president of the Mississippi and Coastal Chemical Corp., in Yazoo City.

Stassen is a former president of the American Baptist Convention, and is now an attorney in Philadelphia. He ran as a "peace candidate" for the Republican nomination as U. S. President, but lost the nomination to President Richard Nixon. He had been a presidential nomination candidate six times previously.

Gov. Buford Ellington of Tennessee will also be one of the speakers for the laymen's congress, which will seek to involve Baptists from about ten different Baptist bodies in North America, including Southern, American, National, and General Baptists.

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Cooper announced several additional speakers for the holiday weekend meeting for laymen. Included in the roster of new speakers recently accepting speaking assignments were:

Frank Foster, assistant pastor of National Memorial Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; Wayne DeHart, of DeHart Motor Lines in Conover, N.C.; Ben Holt, an insurance executive in Pineville, La.; Kenneth Rose, a businessman in Maryville, Tenn.; Arlis Anderson of State College in Mississippi; Joe Sutton, a poultryman from Mount Vernon, Ill.; R. L. T. Beal, insurance man from Sparta, Va., and president of the Virginia Baptist General Association; and Gerald Borchert, professor at North American Baptist Seminary, Souix Falls, S. D.

Cooper had previously confirmed speaking assignments by a dozen speakers for the congress.

The program for the congress is being planned by a steering committee comprised of representatives from each of the 10 Baptist conventions invited to send laymen to the meeting. Combined membership of the 10 Baptist bodies is 20 million.

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C O R R E C T I O N

On BP story mailed 5-12-69, headlined "Dallas Citizens Group Launches Decency Drive," please delete all of graph 3 and the first part of graph 2, eliminating the name of Darold Morgan, pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church, from the list of Baptists involved in the decency drive. Morgan asked that his name be deleted from the story, saying he was appointed to the steering committee without his knowledge or consent. Thanks.

--Baptist Press.



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*460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

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HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203

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