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Church Overwhelmed By
Bible School Success

by George Sheridan

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Even though they planned for it, prayed for it, and hoped for it, Beth Haven Baptist Church in Valley Station, Ky., just outside Louisville, has found that success still comes as a surprise.

The church members and pastor have been overwhelmed by the response to their summer Vacation Bible School, which surpassed its goal for reaching 2,000 children with an enrollment of 2,275. Last year, the enrollment was 1,401.

Associate Pastor Bradley Price, who serves as the Bible School director, listed a score of reasons why large enrollment was expected, but in the flush of success he admitted, "I just can't tell all the reasons for going over our goal."

Price said the biggest single factor in the phenomenal turnout was the church's elaborate transportation program. Beth Haven owns 14 de-commissioned school buses, and used 12 of them to transport some 700 youngsters to the church each day. Since the school's average daily attendance was just over 1,400, the buses accounted for about half the pupils present.

The church buses were also instrumental in the advance promotion for the Bible School. Used throughout the year for Sunday School, each vehicle is assigned a driver and a lay pastor. The pastors are charged with filling their buses with children who would not otherwise attend Sunday School. Then, each pastor has a weekly visit with each of his riders.

For a month prior to the Vacation Bible School, the pastors used the weekly visits to encourage the children to attend.

Another factor in the huge turnout was an awards program for pupils who brought guests and who built up significant attendance records of their own. One student on each bus received an award for the highest record of attendance, bringing visitors and memorizing Scripture.

Bicycles were presented to the highest record holders in the junior, primary and intermediate departments.

A community-wide information program also accounted for some of the record-smashing attendance, according to Price. Some 15,000 circulars were distributed to the area residents, and Price estimates that 45,000 persons were reached this way.

The crowd that responded was almost too big for the facilities. The entire program for the junior-age children was held in rented quarters of Grace Wilkerson Public School next door to the church. About 100 teenagers, many who helped with the Bible School during the day, held their class meetings at night.

The staff for the Bible School totaled 205. An eight-week training program for staff members met weekly prior to the school. A teacher and three helpers were used in each classroom. In the training, four coordinators who direct the year-round Sunday School work in four age groups led the training.

Price said that the "sharpest" teachers in the VBS are used in the program for teenagers. He added that the night schedule for the teen Bible School was the reason for the relatively low enrollment in that department.

A loose structure was adopted for the teen sessions. Class sessions included lectures and dialogue and singing of popular and folk Gospel music.

In place of handiwork and craft sessions, the teenagers elected to take on some service projects. The boys kept the church buses clean, and arranged furniture each night for the next day's VBS session, and the entire group recorded for the broadcast of the church's weekly radio program for teenagers.

The emphasis with the juniors was evangelism. Each day's session concluded with a 30-minute worship service in the church sanctuary, and Price reported that 160 junior children made professions of faith during the two-week series.

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Price found that the juniors were keen about competition, especially between boys and girls. Department leaders capitalized upon this, having contests to inculcate study material. Price attributed a high degree of enthusiasm among the juniors to the fact that so many of them were grouped together.

The entire program culminated with a Sunday night commencement service held outdoors on the grounds of the Grace Wilkerson School. More than 1,200 persons attended.

Price said he has attempted to make the Bible School a community program, and saw hints of success in that the enrollment was interracial and included more than 500 Catholic youngsters. "I can't recall how many times I was called 'Father,'" Price said.

Sunday School enrollment at the church now stands at 2,800 and church membership totals 1,900. Price attributed the growth to the Pastor John Turpin's thorough-going evangelistic emphasis backed up with a well-organized educational program.

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George Sheridan is news director of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

July 23, 1969

Baptist VIEWpoll Report

Baptist Leaders Prefer Appointment
Of "Conservatives" To High Court

by Martin B. Bradley

NASHVILLE (BP)--Appointment of persons with conservative political views to the Supreme Court won majority approval of selected Baptist leaders according to Baptist VIEWpoll a representative panel of Southern Baptist pastors and Sunday School teachers.

When the panel was asked, "Whenever new appointments are made by the President of the Supreme Court, would you like to have persons who are liberal or who are conservative in their political views?" 90.6% of the pastors and 80.6% of the Sunday School teachers responded "conservative." Only 4.5% of the pastors and 5.2% of the Sunday School teachers responded "liberal." The remaining 4.9% of the pastors and 14.2% of the Sunday School teachers had "no opinion."

The poll, conducted during late June and early July, is in marked contrast of the Gallup Poll findings on the same item, taken approximately one month prior to the Baptist VIEWpoll survey. The Gallup Poll found that 52% of those interviewed preferred "conservatives;" while 25% preferred "liberals," and the remaining 23% had "no opinion."

Respondents were asked to express reasons for their position on the court appointments. Dominant themes running through the voluntary comments of those favoring the appointment of "conservatives" to the court were law and order, dissatisfaction with the present Supreme Court members, and a feeling that there has been too much liberalism.

Those favoring the appointment of men with "liberal" political views to the Court expressed a conviction that such appointments would be more in line with progress.

An important factor apparently back of the VIEWpoll response was voiced by one pastor who wrote, "The Supreme Court is liberal now and has provided the means legally for much of the unrest of our day." Or, as one pastor put it, "The liberal element has about wrecked our country and we need a return to conservatism."

A Sunday School teacher wrote, "Too many recent decisions have been too liberal in their content and have fostered additional ideas of revolt in our youth and minority groups."

Speaking in favor of liberal appointees to the Court, one pastor wrote, "Conservatism moves too slowly in a rapidly changing world." Another pastor wrote, "I think men with liberal views are more in line with progress."

The findings are based upon a 91% response by the Baptist VIEWpoll panel members.

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