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October 9, 1969

Urban Sprawl Unites  
Shreveport Associations

by Mary Burns

SHREVEPORT, La. (BP)--When a city sprawls across the boundaries of venerable denominational units such as associations and state conventions as in the case of many metropolitan areas including Shreveport, the result can be chaos.

Baptists in this area recently became the first in the Southern Baptist Convention to respond by consolidating forces in a major urban area. Their experience could be the forerunner of a new concept in urban missions.

Shreveport area Baptists, after two years of careful study and promotion, dissolved three associations and a district organization and formed in their place the Northwest Louisiana Baptist Association.

"As a result," said Superintendent of Missions John Gilbert, "we no longer have four budgets, four sets of officers and four calendars of activity to correlate."

So the move not only simplified Baptist organization in growing Shreveport; it also streamlined strategy procedures and unified fellowship within a defined economic and geographic unit.

The response of the 87 Baptist churches involved has been enthusiastic, Gilbert said, with 86 already having made written application to be a part of the new organization.

Consolidation is not as easy as it might sound to someone unfamiliar with Baptist independence. No Baptist outfit is likely to relinquish its identity and autonomy without good reason.

"A lot of associations need to merge in metropolitan areas," said Russell Bennett of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta. "Some have tried and failed, especially where they have not left the leadership to the pastors."

"But urban life is such that the local church no longer can meet human needs alone. And adequate response demands the coordination of Baptist resources to meet the demands of inter-related urban areas," Bennett said. "The artificial boundaries of associations may no longer be useful for our mission to a rapidly changing urban complex."

Where there is not merger, Bennett added, there at least needs to be joint metropolitan planning committees.

As it is now, cities such as Atlanta, Detroit, and San Francisco have six to eight associations impinging on the metropolitan areas.

The problem is analogous to the political crisis faced by urban sprawl, as one major urban area may be governed by a hundred local governments, each with different interests to protect.

"Jealous protection of associational lines in these cases is called Baptist doctrine," Bennett said, "but it's really Jeffersonian politics."

"If we can't exert leadership and pull people together on a religious basis, we are just aggravating the problem," Bennett observed.

Gilbert came into the Shreveport area six years ago as superintendent of missions for District Six, which covered a geographic area composed of the Bossier, Caddo and North Caddo Baptist Associations.

A district, a phenomenon peculiar only to Louisiana Baptists since Texas discarded the idea a few years ago, is an area designated by the state convention, and assigned to a state convention employee who has no authority over the associations.

"Pastors and education men in the associations told me that the problem was too much overlapping organization," Gilbert said.

The consolidation idea had been discussed for more than two years before it was accomplished. It definitely was facilitated by the fact that Gilbert, as district superintendent, was acting superintendent of missions in each of the three associations.

Now the district, as well as the three associations, has been dissolved, and Gilbert serves the new association that has resulted.

"We planned projects the associations could do together during these two years, such as evangelistic crusades, surveys and world mission conferences," Gilbert said.

The terminology of "being taken over" was avoided and the concept of phasing out the old and establishing the new was carefully communicated.

The cities continue to spill out over political and ecclesiastical boundaries, but Shreveport may have set the example for the future of Baptist polity in urban America.

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Mary Burns is editorial assistant in the Atlanta regional office of Baptist Press.

SBC Stewardship Commission  
To Lead Kansas Fund Campaign

10/9/69

WICHITA, Kan. (BP)--The Executive Board of the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists approved a proposal here that the Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention be requested to lead the financially-troubled convention in a \$1½ million fund campaign.

The fund drive was one of several plans that a five-man board of managers appointed by the state securities commissioner to solve the convention's indebtedness had earlier approved and reported to the Executive Board.

Sen. Lester Arvin, a Wichita attorney who is chairman of the board of managers, said that the staff of the SBC Stewardship Commission had already accepted the invitation to assist the Kansas convention with the fund campaign.

Arvin said the convention hoped to raise \$1½ million by Dec. 31, 1970. "We think we can do it, with the Stewardship Commission's help. It would reduce our indebtedness to \$1½ million if we are successful," Arvin said.

William H. Pitt, director of endowment and capital giving service, SBC Stewardship Commission, will direct the campaign. Pitt spoke briefly to the board, saying that the Stewardship Commission was happy to give its assistance and service to help the Kansas convention in a time of need.

In other action, the board accepted the resignation of Galen Irby, associate executive secretary of the convention, effective Dec. 31. Irby has held the post, which includes stewardship, promotion, Brotherhood and other responsibilities, for the past two years.

Arvin, in a report to the board, said that in order to solve the financial crisis facing the convention, the management board felt it must restructure the staff, and reduce the costs of office space presently used by the staff.

Proposals have been made to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Sunday School Board and Woman's Missionary Union for staff assistance which may help alleviate our problems in some areas, Arvin said.

He added that plans are underway for what he called a "summit conference" of Kansas and Southern Baptist Convention leaders on Oct. 22 to work out these and other plans.

Other plans call for an all-out effort to encourage the 44 churches which are behind on loan payments secured by bonds issued by the Church Loan Association to catch up and keep up with their payments, and strong appeals for churches in the convention to increase their giving through the Cooperative Program to meet requirements for the \$2,000-a-week payments to the bond's sinking fund.

Kenneth Combs, vice chairman of the Executive Board who presided, said that he was very pleased with the spirit of the meeting. "There was a feeling among the board members that we are now moving forward toward solving the problems," said Combs, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Overland Park, Kan.

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Baptists Defend Church  
Property Tax Exemption

by W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--Church claims for tax exemption of church property must be based on (1) religious liberty or (2) equality and equity, according to a policy statement adopted here by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

In its action, the committee made it clear that it was speaking only for itself and not for other Baptist bodies.

However, the tax policy statement was referred to the Baptist conventions and conferences that sponsor the Baptist Joint Committee for study and response.

In addition to representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist Joint Committee is composed of members from the American Baptist Convention, the Baptist General Conference, the North American Baptist General Conference, Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, the Baptist Federation of Canada and two National Baptist conventions.

The Baptist agency made its policy statement as preparation of an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief to be submitted to the U. S. Supreme Court in a current case on the taxation of church property.

The Supreme Court will soon hear arguments on the case (Frederick Walz V. Tax Commission of the City of New York) in which tax exemption for church property is challenged.

The Baptist Joint Committee pointed out in its statement that churches and denominations generally have accepted tax exemptions "without examining either the legal or ethical reasons behind them or without attempting to establish a rationale" for tax policies.

It was in an effort to state a "clear rationale" that the committee approved its policy statement.

"Religious liberty does not demand," the committee declared, "the tax exemption of all church property and activity." However, it pointed out that the ability of government to tax "could at least hinder or prosper particular religious movements or manifestations."

Consequently, the statement continued, "religious liberty requires that there be few hindrances on churches as they attempt to achieve the purposes for which they have been organized and that whatever limits are imposed must be in the spirit of the First and Fourteenth Amendments" to the national constitution.

The committee further said that some church tax exemptions are hard to justify on the basis of religious liberty, although some of them might be justified on the basis of equality and equity. Among these the committee listed:

1. "Engaging in business projects unrelated to religious concerns, with income tax and property tax exemptions, in competition with private enterprise;
2. "Ownership of real property which produces income but which is not taxed for local governmental services;
3. "Claiming of tax exemption for property which is used for personal residence; and
4. "Long-term holding of real property on a tax exempt basis for capital gains."

Regarding community services to churches for which they do not pay taxes, the committee said, "Where the value of services rendered by government to a property is ascertainable, churches should make payment for those services."

Under the principle of "equality and equity" the committee said that "churches...should be given equality in tax privileges with other nonprofit organizations rendering the same social services to the community." As illustrations of such services the committee listed schools, children's homes, hospitals and pension boards.

The committee asserted that "the freedom of churches to be active in social ministries" should not be handicapped by taxes "that are not applicable to comparable public or other private nonprofit agencies."

"In the event that complete equality is unfair," the committee declared, "churches should seek to achieve equitable treatment."

Finally, the committee said that "exemption from taxation on the basis of services rendered requires a commitment to the common good rather than to a selective religious ministry or to a program of religious recruiting."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Complete text of the statement has been mailed to Baptist state editors and executive secretaries. It is available to others who request it from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C., 20002, (Telephone 544-4226).

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Conscience, Dissent, Liberty  
To Get Baptist Attention

10/9/69

WASHINGTON (BP)--Problems related to freedom of conscience and dissent in an ordered society are top priority items on the agenda of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, according to action taken at its semi-annual meeting here.

In one action the committee voted to "address ourselves to an in-depth study of the freedom of conscience, the right to dissent and other matters relating to the historic position of religious liberty."

In another action the committee instructed its staff to develop the next Religious Liberty Conference in August around the theme of dissent and its broad implications. The details and specific approaches to this problem will be worked out for recommendation to the semi-annual meeting of the committee in March, 1970.

The committee also took note of increasing church-state issues in the states. It directed its staff to develop guidelines that might be of help to Baptists "in the stewardship of influence in the states." These will also be presented to the March, 1970, meetings of the committee.

As a public affairs issue of concern to Baptists, the committee looked briefly at the various proposals for minimum income for people. This will get major consideration in the next March meeting.

The committee instructed its executive director, C. Emanuel Carlson, to take a leave of absence to begin at least by January, 1970, for the purpose of writing a book or books on religious liberty and the stewardship of influence by Baptists in public life.

Re-elected chairman of the committee was Homer J. Tucker, director of urban work and community ministries for the New Jersey Baptist Convention. Chauncey R. Daley, editor of the Western Recorder in Middletown, Ky., was re-elected vice chairman. Tucker, a Negro, is an American Baptist and Daley is a Southern Baptist.

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