

(BP)---FEATURES

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Baptists Scratch Itch To Reach Youth With Coffeehouse Ministry

by Mary Burns
For The Baptist Press

Southern Baptists have been infected by the coffeehouse itch. And they scratch the itch by operating dozens of coffeehouse ministries across the country in an effort to reach young people.

The coffeehouse has become one of the most effective methods of reaching youth, in fact all people, who ordinarily do not or will not come to church.

The coffeehouse may be a community in lostness, but workers in the coffeehouse ministry attribute its success to this sense of community.

Accompanying the itch to establish coffeehouses has been much criticism and a great diversity of opinions about their validity as a Christian ministry.

Many of the flourishing coffeehouses are in pioneer areas where Southern Baptist work is not established and where pastors have had to start from scratch. Wendell Belew, secretary of the department of pioneer missions for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, considers it a method of extending the church.

"This department is concerned with establishing any program to reach people," he said. Recognizing that a large percentage of Americans are under 25, the coffeehouse ministry has been supported, sometimes financially and always morally, by the pioneer missions department.

"This may be the hardest group to reach," Belew said. "It may also be the most responsive. This group is searching for values; their values have not been established yet. If the church can be willing to take its message to people who are rebellious against the church, it can have excellent results."

Wearing catchy names, coffeehouses dispense hard rock music, company for lonely kids and a large measure of love and acceptance.

The "coffeehouse itch" appeared very recently and many attempts have failed. But through this frustration and failure, the coffeehouse has established itself as an evangelistic tool which succeeds, though its success cannot be measured in terms of other Southern Baptist ministries.

Dressed in mod clerical garb of collar, bell-bottom slacks and sandals, Larry Patterson and James Daves of Brooklyn's Park Slope Church serve more than 200 youngsters between 16 and 21 each night at "The Catacombs."

On Friday nights, The Catacombs is a coffeehouse; on Saturdays it becomes a Christian discotheque complete with psychedelic lights, black walls and long-haired entertainers.

"The result has been the opportunity to get kids off the street," Patterson said. "It's sharing with them the fact that Christ can turn you on like narcotics."

Although policemen regularly check The Catacombs, the kids are granted freedom. "These kids know authority but they don't know love and forgiveness," Patterson explained. "They are taking responsibility. They want it."

There have been no professions of faith yet, but the house claims great results. A US-2 missionary who recently began his two-year term at Park Slope was hit in the eye the second weekend he was at the house. After seeing the worker's response, a bystander commented, "it took quite a Christian not to slug back."

Policemen have been so impressed by the house that they asked Patterson and Daves to keep it open later at night "because 11:30 was too early for Brooklyn youngsters." So the house is beginning a "Psyche Morning" from 12:00 midnight until 2:00 a.m. Only persons 18 and older will be allowed to stay until two.

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Armed with a store-front church, a group of eager teenagers and a dream, Danny Sheffield, US-2er from Georgia, started "The Whale's Belly" in New London, Conn.

Young people from his church pitched in to help, but the first weekend the house opened, no local people came. After a massive publicity effort, the next weekend they were packed, with more than 500 attending.

"The problem in this area is the lack of recreation for these kids," Sheffield explained. "Kids are just 'on the run' and that usually results in trouble."

Although the Belly is in a poverty area, a cross section of people come. It's clientele includes the poor, the hippie and the straight.

Each summer thousands of kids roam aimlessly on the beaches of New Hampshire. Bill Jenkins, minister of Screven Memorial Baptist Church of Portsmouth, N.H., recognized their need for a place to go and, with the aid of his church members, began the Agape In (the Love In) this past summer at Hampton Beach.

He was frightened at first about opening a coffeehouse because the adults in his area view with skepticism any place where youngsters gather. He decided instead on a sandwich shop.

His church purchased a three story guest house and turned the first floor into a shop. The second became a hostel for guests (and runaway youngsters) and the third was used for a dormitory for the summer workers who operated the shop.

At first the citizens of Hampton Beach were apprehensive; there was even a petition circulated to close the shop. But before summer's end parents were expressing gratitude for "a church that was concerned about the problems of the young."

Agape In probably ministered to 8,000 people during the 10 weeks of summer. The house had to close for the autumn and winter because the church did not have sufficient funds to heat the building.

Screven Memorial Church has been in Portsmouth for seven years. "In 10 weeks at Hampton Beach we became better known than we had in seven years at Portsmouth," Jenkins said. "As far as becoming known as a people concerned, we had more of an effect. Many people here don't know anything about Southern Baptists, but the 8,000 kids we ministered to know something about Southern Baptists."

Bob Tremaine cuts a gargantuan figure (6'6, 250 lbs.) which must be impressive to the young people around his Worcester, Mass., church. One of the multiple ministries of the Worcester Baptist Chapel, where Tremaine is pastor, is a coffeehouse, "The Lost and Found."

The L and F opened this summer serving personal witnessing with the coffee and soft drinks.

"We have more atmosphere than you can shake a stick at," Tremaine said laughingly. The house is located in an 80-year-old building whose decor features cobwebs and bats (which fly through periodically).

Bible studies are held Tuesday night at the house followed by a half-hour of folk entertainment. On weekends the entertainment lasts an hour. The house has presented a religious light show and hopes to produce short religious plays.

"The coffeehouse is a place for kids to go," Tremaine says, "but the validity of our being here is that our people are at the tables to witness. The aim of our house is to bring people into a life changing experience with Christ."

Although Tremaine feels strongly that the coffeehouse should be evangelistic, some of the other ministers do not agree. The coordinators of The Catacombs refuse to push salvation onto their kids.

"We're concerned about the concept of recognizing the worth of the individual," Patterson said. "We're not concerned about pushing salvation and pushing the church. When the kids are converted, they are still in the community of hell."

"We are concerned because they're people," Patterson continued. "We believe God will give the increase. Before they can trust our Christ they must learn to trust us. They must believe that we're honestly trying to give them a service and not trying to preach at them."

Although Jenkins agrees that there is a danger in the coffeehouse becoming another entertainment center he feels that the fact that these young people need a place to go is sufficient reason for Christians to respond.

Narcotics is the common problem in all the houses. One of the signs in The Catacombs says, "if you can't dig yourself, don't make the scene." Translated, it means if you can't discipline yourself don't come in.

"If they cannot psyche themselves up enough we would rather they not come in our house," Patterson said. "Psyching themselves up" sometimes means standing on one leg for a five count. This indicates that a youngster is fairly sober and will not "OD" (a slang expression for taking an overdose of pills) and have to be hospitalized.

Jenkins admits that many young people come to the Agape while they are tripping (after taking LSD). One boy, who had been a visitor in Jenkins' home, came to the house, informed Jenkins that he was tripping and shared the trip with the minister, explaining the hallucinations he was having as the drug took effect.

Despite this problem the ministers defend their kids. "They are very honest," Jenkins says. "They are seeking and they're searching. The kids are our best protectors. They know that if a pusher is found in the house it will be closed. They are a lot better than most people assume they are."

Patterson echoes this defense. "The kids do the disciplining and the work," he says. "They sober up their friends who come to the house high on dope."

The coffeehouse has no cultural barriers; it never asks who you are. "In reality, this may be the only way to reach these people," Belew explained. "The coffeehouse provides a marvelous place for the Christian testimony since it's 'in' for a person to express himself. Nothing is too oddball."

To the critics of the coffeehouse, Belew says, "if you're going to demand that a person meet you on the level in which you are comfortable, you're going to lose him. The people who come to the coffeehouse are usually un-Christian but not anti-Christian. When you are there you feel the presence of Christ in an uncomfortable way. There is a sense of expectancy.

"The coffeehouse may not be a Christian community," he concludes, "but it's more than you find in many churches."

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Theme, "Living the Christlife"
Picked For 1970 SBC Sessions

DENVER (BP)--"Living the Christlife" will be the theme for the Southern Baptist Convention when it meets here for its 125th anniversary sessions, June 1-4, 1970.

The general theme and themes for each of the seven different sessions of the convention were selected by the convention's committee on order of business, headed by Robert S. Scales, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Oklahoma City.

Scales said that the convention will open with a special dramatic production in observance of the denomination's 125th anniversary. The opening Monday night session will also include an address by SBC President W. A. Criswell of Dallas.

Theme for the opening session will be , "The Christlife--A Blessed Heritage,"

Though the convention starts on Monday rather than Tuesday night as in the past, there will be a total of only seven sessions, compared to the usual nine sessions of most other conventions, Scales said.

The other six sessions will carry out the theme, "The Christlife," and will cover (in order, Tuesday morning through Thursday morning), "A Blessed Responsibility,"

Each of the other six sessions will use the theme, "The Christlife, A Blessed Responsibility," "...Service," "...Fellowship," "...Ministry," "...Witness," and "...A Blessed Challenge," (Listed in order, Tuesday morning through Thursday morning.)

Other members of the committee which picked the themes are: J. Norris Palmer, pastor Baton Rouge, La; Horace Chapman, pastor, Saint Marys, Ga.; J. William Angell, college professor, Winston-Salem, N.C.; Robert L. Mills college president, Georgetown, Ky.; and Frank Hooper, federal judge, Atlanta, Ga.

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Baptist Standard Editorial
Prompts Sears Sunday Closing

10/28/69

DALLAS (BP)--Sears, Roebuck & Co., cancelled plans to open major stores in the Dallas-Fort Worth area on Sundays during November and December after the Baptist Standard protested editorially and sponsored a letter writing campaign to the management.

Sears' announcement it would remain closed said simply it was based on a "complete re-examination of the matter."

"Shame on Sears, Roebuck & Co.," said the First Baptist Standard editorial in mid-October "It once was among our favorite department stores. It now has dropped itself into the company or merchandisers more interested in grabbing dollars than in being a credit to the community."

The editorial argued that the Sears policy would cause other stores to reconsider their practice of Sunday closing.

The name and address of the Dallas area management was given with an appeal to Baptist Standard readers for letters of protest.

"There can be no doubt but that letters of protest caused Sears to change its policy," said John J. Hurt, editor of the Baptist Standard. "Our mail indicated Sears was swamped with protests."

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A Standard editorial following announcement the company would remain closed on Sundays said: "Sears did a big thing and, once again, it has our admiration as a leading citizen in the communities it serves."

Commending Sears for admitting its error, the editorial concluded: "It takes a big man to admit a mistake and reverse himself. It is the same for a company."

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Professor Proposes Rewriting
History of Christian Doctrine

10/28/69

LOUISVILLE (BP)--A leading Southern Baptist theologian has called for the rewriting of the history of Christian doctrine by a panel of distinguished scholars drawn from a wide variety of denominational, cultural and geographic backgrounds.

James Leo Garrett, professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here and current chairman of a Baptist World Alliance Study Commission on Cooperative Christianity, made the appeal during a faculty address at the seminary.

Garrett said the revised history of Christian doctrine would put more adequate resources at the disposal of Christian leaders facing contemporary revolutionary problems.

Since the end of the 18th century, various histories of Christian doctrine have been frequently written, Garrett said. Whether any of these can suffice for today's increasingly ecumenical Christianity in a secular and pluralistic world culture is indeed open to serious question, he said.

He cited current trends which call for such a comprehensive study, including the modern tendency to regard Christianity as essentially action; the current preference for paperbacks and articles free from the presses instead of Christian teachings from preceding centuries; the rising demand for a "secular Christianity" and a new consolidated world religion; and the popularity of such novel theological movements as the "Death of God" theory.

Urging an interdisciplinary approach to writing such a history, Garrett said it ought to be closely related to such other disciplines as the history of Biblical interpretation, Christian apologetics, Christian ethics, and relationship with other world religions.

Though he did not name persons he felt should do the study, Garrett advocated an intercontinental writing team of carefully chosen scholars representing diverse theological, national and denominational viewpoints.

He further proposed that this comprehensive history of Christian doctrine be pursued to the publication of a multi-volume series, of use to Christian leaders in many countries and traditions.

The committee approach to the writing of such a work is valuable not only because it gathers together many specialized skills, Garrett said, but it involves an investment of time which would hardly be possible for one human being.

A native of Texas, where he was pastor of several churches, Garrett is a graduate of Harvard University, and holds both the doctor of philosophy and doctor of theology degrees. His doctoral dissertation at Harvard dealt with Protestant-Catholic relationships. He has done post-doctoral study at Oxford University.

The seminary professor was one of four Southern Baptists to attend Vatican Council II as a guest of the Roman Catholic Church's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. He was at the Council during the fourth session in 1965.

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Mobilization Night
Demobilizes Santa

10/28/69

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Santa Claus, busy man though he is, has decided to postpone his Christmas parade here to avoid a conflicting meeting scheduled by his Baptist friends.

Knoxville's 1969 Christmas parade, previously scheduled for Dec. 1, has been changed to Dec. 4 to avoid a conflict with Mobilization Night (M-Night) sponsored by Baptist churches in the city.

Since 6,000 to 7,000 people are expected to attend the program sponsored by the Knox County Association of Baptists, the Greater Knoxville Christmas Parade committee altered the date for the parade to allow those involved in it to participate in the annual church training event.

Another reason for the change in date, according to Jerry Julian, chairman of the parade committee, is that "with the combination of this event and the parade, the traffic problem would be almost insurmountable."

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