

**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

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

December 16, 1969

**Stewardship Commission Asks
Ben Gill To Lead Kansas Drive**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Following the sudden and unexpected death of William H. Pitt, Sr., the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission here has asked Pitt's assistant, Ben G. Gill, to do the staff work in leading a \$500,000 fund campaign for Kansas Baptists.

Pitt, director of endowment and capital giving services for the SBC Stewardship Commission, had been directing the fund drive for the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists when he died of a heart attack in his car near Baton Rouge, La.

Gill, consultant in endowment and capital giving services for the SBC Stewardship Commission, was assigned the Kansas Convention fund campaign at the request of Lester Arvin, attorney in Wichita, Kan., and chairman of the Kansas Baptist management board.

The announcement of Gill's assignment came from Merrill D. Moore, executive director of the SBC Stewardship Commission, who explained that Gill was taking on the additional work under his present responsibility as consultant with the commission.

Gill will continue the work Pitt started in seeking to raise \$500,000 from Southern Baptist churches in Kansas and Nebraska as part of a three-pronged campaign to raise \$1½ million to meet sinking fund requirements for church bonds issued by the Kansas Church Loan Association.

Before his death, Pitt reported an optimistic spirit among the Baptists of Kansas and said he felt sure the convention would meet its goal.

Gill, former pastor of First Baptist Church in LaGrange, Tex., has been with the SBC Stewardship Commission since September, and has for several years previous been a building fund consultant and fund drive coordinator for the Stewardship Division of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

His major assignment with the SBC Stewardship Commission is assisting local churches with building and special fund campaigns, working in cooperation with state convention stewardship offices. He also is leading a major fund campaign for the Alto Frio Baptist Encampment in Texas.

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Clergy Rail Permits Available

12/16/69

NASHVILLE (BP)--Applications for clergy permits allowing ordained ministers to obtain half-price fares for railway transportation in the South are available from the Southern Baptist Convention headquarters, Porter R. Routh, executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee has announced.

Routh said that a clergy permit book with 25 coupons entitling ministers to 25 train tickets at half price is available from the Southern Passenger Association in Atlanta, upon their approval of applications and payment of an \$8 membership fee.

The application forms are available from Routh's office at 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, Tenn., 37219.

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(BP)---FEATURES

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December 16, 1969

'Meanest Man in West Dallas'
Changes Reputation, Retires

by John Carter

DALLAS (BP)--A Baptist minister who once was known as "the meanest man in West Dallas" until he entered the ministry will retire soon after Christmas, but he plans to stay as active as his poor health will allow.

Brother Bill Harrod (everyone calls him "Brother Bill") will step down from the pulpit of the Palacios Street Baptist Mission to devote all his energy toward his well-known "Helping Hand Club."

The former rough-and tumble, hard-drinking welder with a third-grade education had a reputation as the meanest man in an already tough Dallas neighborhood in the 1930's.

Buel Crouch, pastor of the Grace Temple Baptist Church here which sponsors the Palacios Street Mission, admits that he was a little afraid to visit Harrod and witness to him, but he did.

Crouch remembers one meeting with Harrod prior to his conversion. Harrod was, by his own admission, two-thirds drunk, and Crouch recalled that he asked him, "Why don't you go home and sober up and come to church with your family tomorrow--it's Easter,?"

"And he said in reply, 'Preacher, I like you, and I'm going to join your so-and-so church,' (I won't use the exact words he said), 'and I'm going to make the best blankety-blank member you got,'" Crouch recalled.

On Easter Sunday, 1939, Bill Harrod walked down the aisle of that church, immediately, followed by his two sons, both amazed that their father would even darken the door of a church, much less make a decision.

Brother Bill immediately let his pastor know that this was no superficial conversion experience. "Brother Buel, when you baptize me, you baptize my pocketbook too," he exclaimed.

Immediately afterwards, Brother Bill set out to witness to "every hardened sinner he knew, and he knew plenty of 'em," according to Crouch. And as he witnessed, Brother Bill began to feel "the call" of the ministry, Crouch said.

He went out and bought a children's Bible story book and a Sears Roebuck record cutting machine and started practicing, preaching and playing it back--always dissatisfied with the results. "I'd say 'my goodness, they couldn't take that!' and I'd go on until four or five o'clock in the morning," Harrod recalled.

Then he rented a tent and started preaching around Dallas. Brother Bill wasn't ordained and he paid the \$40 per month rental for the tent out of his own pocket, but he was happy because he was preaching.

Then he was fired from his welding job, because he was spending too much time preaching and witnessing. He took one more job in the welding trade, but it didn't work out.

"I'd put that helmet on and I couldn't weld very long, because the tears would be dropping inside my glasses, and I'd have to stop and take it off.

"I was the most miserable guy in the world, so one day, I quit to go preach for a little church at \$10 a week."

There is little to love about West Dallas. It is a melange of industrial sites, project housing, poverty. It has been that way for many years. It is hard-core nowheresville.

But an uneducated roughneck welder started loving West Dallas in 1939 and that love affair is still going today.

"When I first started preaching here," Brother Bill recollects, "It was a two mile walk to the nearest bus line. I would see poor mothers carrying their babies through rain and bitter cold, so that their children could be treated at a charity ward.

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"Sometimes women would go under the viaduct between here and town to have their babies. You can't see something like that and not be touched," he said with feeling.

Conditions like those force pastors to be political realists, and more than one city councilman or utilities official has felt the sharp bite of Brother Bill's criticism or has been swayed by his pull-no-punches descriptions of West Dallas "like it is."

Today, West Dallas is still a pretty grim neighborhood, but bus lines run through, the local medical association assigns volunteer doctors and nurses to work in the Palacios Street Mission, for both out-patient care and well-baby clinics. The residents of the area, like many other low-income minority groups across the nation, are coming to a growing awareness of their rights and responsibilities, along with increased pride in their ethnic heritage.

Brother Bill has been a contributor to that progress, because he was there.

When it was hard times for everybody, Brother Bill suffered along with them. He fought with (and for), joked with, and shared his faith with West Dallas for approximately 30 years.

Every year, Brother Bill has promoted and held an annual Christmas Shoe Party for the kids of West Dallas. Since 1943, his efforts have placed an average of more than 5,000 pairs of shoes per year on needy children's feet.

At his mission, which has a benevolent ministry to people who need food, or clothing, any family down on their luck receives a genuine and unsuspecting welcome.

Harrod has baptized almost 3,000 converts in his ministry. He doesn't plan to quit now, even though he will place most of his energy into the benevolent aspects of the work he established.

He is famous for his many soul-winning illustrations, many of them humorous and homespun.

He admits that leaving the pulpit is the "second-toughest thing" he has ever done. What is the toughest? "Telling people who have next-to-nothing that they are expected to tithe after they have accepted Jesus."

"But poor people," he argued, "need to tithe lots worse than rich people, because you see, they need the blessings worse than other people.

"I know a woman on welfare," he recounted. "She only receives \$100 or so a month. But as soon as she receives her check, she runs over there and gives the mission her tithe right away, so that she won't be tempted to spend it."

Naturally, Brother Bill takes a great deal of pride in his rise from the honky-tonks to the satisfying career that has been his. "But I didn't do all of that," he waves his hand toward the mission and on out across the neighborhood. "The Lord and the good people of Dallas, of all denominations, who support this, they have done it."

At 66 years of age, Brother Bill paused a few minutes to reminisce and think about the sum total of this ministry. But then there was a knock on the door to his study. There stood a man and his pregnant wife. They needed help.

Brother Bill took five dollars out of his wallet and palmed it in his hand.



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460 James Robertson Parkway
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DAVIS C. WOOLLEY HO
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