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January 20, 1970

Guideposts Magazine Gives
Pensacola Church Top Award

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP)--Declaring that "there is no generation gap in this church," Norman Vincent Peale of New York City presented to the First Baptist Church of Pensacola the 1970 Church of the Year award for the church's "creative" youth program.

"We think you're doing the greatest piece of youth work of any church in the country," said Peale, editor-in-chief of Guideposts and pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York. Peale presented a large bronze plaque to the pastor, James L. Pleitz.

"You've got a dynamic church under a great spiritual leader," said Peale as he made the presentation before a crowd of 1,800 persons.

Inscribed on the bronze plaque were the words, "Guideposts Church Award...honoring the congregation of the First Baptist Church of Pensacola...,for the scope and strength of its youth programs.

"To the adults for their initiative, to the young people for their response--together they proved that 'Christianity is something you do,'" concluded the inscription.

According to the Guideposts citation, the Pensacola church has done a lot in its ministry to youth during the past year. The award recognized the church for such things as:

--Holding "underground church" services for about 75 teenagers who learned from the experience what it might have been like for the first century Christians to endure persecution (the youth were "arrested" and "jailed" in a set-up plan for "tresspassing" in an abandoned warehouse);

--Rebuilding and repainting the Beach Boulevard Baptist Church at Henderson Point near Pass Christian, Miss., following Hurricane Camille (the church is located just outside the gates of Gulfshore Baptist Assembly);

--Repairing and repainting the Pine Forest Baptist Chapel in Pensacola, a mission of the Bellview Baptist Church here;

--Production of a folk-rock musical, "Tell It Like It Is," which proved so popular that it drew standing room crowds, and was repeated at the high school auditorium and the Florida State Fair.

An article written by a teenage member of the church, Miss Teresha Thames, entitled "Night Raid" telling the story of the "underground church" program, precedes the citation from the magazine in its February issue.

It is the first time in the 13 years that Guideposts has been giving the award that a Southern Baptist congregation has been selected for the honor. Guideposts has a world-wide circulation of 2.2 million.

Van Garner, roving editor of Guideposts, explained that the editors each year "comb the nation, querying readers, religion editors and church members about churches that have reached beyond the normal call of religion in their efforts to understand and help their fellow man."

Both Pleitz and Garner had high words of praise for the leadership of the church's former youth director, Miss Helen May, and its minister of music, Paul Royal, who worked closely with the youth.

Garner said the youth responded "triumphantly" to their leadership, and "with imagination and energy."

Pleitz said the entire church was tremendously excited about the selection of the church to receive the award, and that the recognition for its youth program was consistent with the outstanding work being done by the church in every area.

"I'm very proud of the congregation," Pleitz said. "Our people realize that being a Christian involves all of life and not just a few hours on Sunday. I would dare anyone to find a happier group anywhere."

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After Peale had presented the bronze plaque to Pletiz, the pastor responded by telling Peale, "If you're going to make an award for the Church of the Decade we'll be in the running because we have some exciting things planned for the future."

Pleitz is well-known throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, having served as chairman of the denomination's influential national Executive Committee for several years.

Several top Baptist leaders were special guests at the presentation, including Porter R. Routh, executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee; Harold Bennett, executive secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention, and Florida Convention President Doug Watterson of Tallahassee, Fla.

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PHOTO to be mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Hays Appointed Chairman
Of Good Neighbor Council 1/20/70

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Former Southern Baptist Convention President Brooks Hays of Winston-Salem, N.C., has been appointed chairman of the North Carolina Good Neighbor Council, an interracial organization dealing with race relations, by Gov. Bob Scott.

Hays is director of the Ecumenical Institute at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, and former U.S. Congressman from Arkansas. He was president of the SBC from 1958-60.

It was Hays' strong stand on the Little Rock school desegregation issue that prompted his defeat for re-election to Congress in 1958 while serving as SBC president. Hays is a long-time advocate of racial integration.

He will head the committee comprised of 10 whites and 10 blacks, and led by the staff direction of a Baptist layman, Fred Cooper of Raleigh. J. Marse Grant, editor of the Biblical Recorder, the North Carolina Baptist state paper, is a member of the council.

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Church Gives Plane
To Aid Rhodesians 1/20/70

RICHMOND (BP)--Grand Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Smith, Ark., has given an airplane to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board here to be used in medical and evangelistic work in Rhodesia.

H. Cornell Goerner, the board's secretary for Africa, received a check for $28,000 as the final payment on the plane. The church, with a membership of about 1,700 had previously made a $1,000 down payment.

Clifford L. Palmer, pastor of the church, spent a week in the Sanyati-Gokwe area of Rhodesia last September. Traveling overland with the missionaries to their various places of duty, he observed that a plane would facilitate their work.

Gokwe, an underdeveloped region with a population of 115,000 is across a river from Sanyati, location of a Baptist hospital. Lives have been saved in emergencies when a plane was on hand to fly patients from Gokwe to Sanyati, but the Baptist missionaries have formerly had use of a plane only three days every two weeks.

Goerner estimates that a day's trip over difficult roads and trails will be shortened to an hour by plane.

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BP PHOTO mailed to state Baptist papers.

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