

(BP)---FEATURES

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Italian Baptist Pastor
Launches War on Povertyby Theo Sommerkamp
Director, European Baptist Press Service

SAN VITO, Sardinia (BP)--A Baptist pastor on the Italian island of Sardinia has launched his own war on poverty here, helping to create a small industry for manufacturing sweaters.

The sweaters, produced on a very modest scale, are marketed in some stores in Cagliari, the chief city on the island, and are sold on the Italian mainland by friends of the pastor.

To the pastor, Luigi D'Isanto, and his friends, the project is an experiment in Christian social action. They hope to help the people in the little village of San Vito to overcome the chronic unemployment of the area.

His efforts have met with some criticism by fellow Baptists and others, however. The main objection has come from those who feel that the "Christian" aspect should be stressed harder, and from those who expect to see immediate results, especially in evangelism.

D'Isanto entered the social action field after making a name for himself in seminary days as a persuasive and imaginative preacher. He was the kind who could hold a non-captive audience's attention in the town "piazzas," the village and city squares of Italy.

Handsome and muscular, D'Isanto grew up in southern Italy, and knows the difficulties of day-to-day existence facing so many of his countrymen. Much of southern Italy has been left untouched by the Italian industrial boom to the north.

One of D'Isanto's leading supporters is Piero Bensi, pastor of the Baptist church in Florence, Italy, and vice president of the Italian Baptist Union.

Bensi, a former pastor in Sardinia himself, described D'Isanto's work as "a challenge to the fear and passiveness of an entire town. It is an attempt to help it rediscover its energy and to revitalize itself for the future."

D'Isanto's experiment in social action started in 1968 when he offered to give lessons to all secondary school students who were to take examinations in about three months. About 20 students who otherwise would have had no help in preparing for the exams worked with D'Isanto and his wife, a school teacher, from six in the morning until 10 in the evening. All passed the exams.

Bensi said that the members of D'Isanto's church expected many of the students would come to the church to worship, but they did not. The pastor was accused of not speaking to them about salvation.

"But these young people now have more open minds," Bensi related. "They know that a Protestant pastor is not a person distant from their problems. They know they can come to talk with him."

With winter coming on, D'Isanto sought ways to make a more lasting impression and to help ward off more hunger, cold, misery and despair. Most of the men in Sardinia were employed in the winter cutting trees for "terrible wages" about 40 kilometers from their homes, Bensi said.

D'Isanto had an inspiration. He would take on the life of a woodcutter to see if there was a way out of this desperate situation. With the other woodcutters, D'Isanto would leave San Vito in the landlord's automobile at six in the morning and return at 6:30 that night.

"D'Isanto tried to convince the workmen of their sad plight," Bensi observed. "While they agreed, they feared losing the work and the little bit of bread that their wages buy." D'Isanto and his fellow workmen demanded reasonable wages and hours. The landlords rejected the demands. The workmen rebelled and quit.

Aided by Baptist friends outside Sardinia, D'Isanto rented some land from the government, acquired a power saw and other tools, and began his own timber-cutting enterprise.

Because D'Isanto had his pastor's income, he used his woodcutting wage to pay off debts made in launching the effort.

Many of the church people considered the timber project a waste of time. Yet D'Isanto indicated that many of the workmen had a better than usual winter. They paid off old debts with their better income.

The men are no longer willing to work under the arduous conditions imposed by the employers from Cagliari. D'Isanto questions whether the project "has been useless" just because "no one has made a decision for Christ."

The idea for the sweater manufacturing project came to D'Isanto while the timber work was in progress. D'Isanto felt something had to be done to keep more of the men from leaving Sardinia for work elsewhere, while their families stayed behind.

The idea was to form a sweater cooperative employing 20 to 25 workers. The first obstacle was to find money to buy machinery. Even after obtaining the machines, with the region of Sardinia contributing 60 per cent of the \$30,000 needed, difficulties continued. Light bills, rent, interest to creditors and other expenses had to be met. For a while, the workers toiled with little or no compensation, but with hopes high for the future.

A Catholic businessman in the community told Bensi, "The venture at San Vito must succeed. We are like sheep. If we see the first one jump over the ditch and survive, we all follow. Then we can escape from those who exploit our fears."

"And not only others in San Vito are watching, but also the people in all the surrounding villages," the businessman said.



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March 3, 1970

International Conference Set
In Tokyo On Teaching, Training

WASHINGTON (BP)--An International Conference on Christian Teaching and Training will be held in Tokyo, July 7-10, just before the Baptist World Congress, according to an announcement from the Baptist World Alliance headquarters here.

The conference will be sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance Commission on Christian Teaching and Training, chaired by Clifton J. Allen of Nashville, retired editorial secretary for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Similar conferences were held in connection with the Baptist World Congress in Rio de Janeiro in 1969 and in Miami Beach in 1965.

Attendance will be by invitation, with participants coming from Baptist unions and conventions around the world. Those invited will have special interest and experience in Christian education.

Following the theme, "Christian Education for the Living Church," the program will feature four study papers seeking to interpret the teaching mission of the church, and to explore the areas of curriculum, leadership and administration, Allen said.

The conference is designed to be a practical workshop in Christian education principles and practices, Allen said. It will provide for dialogue and evaluation of ways to make the church's educational ministry of maximum value, keeping always in mind a relevant application to the situation in Baptist unions and conventions around the world.

There will be extended periods of small group discussion to feature "the interchange and testing of ideas, the sharing of experience, and the consideration of ways for adaptation and implementation of basic principles of varying cultural situations and to varying educational patterns in our Baptist world fellowship."

The conference also will explore ways through which the commission can stimulate and help to implement a new thrust in the church's mission of teaching and training during the 1970-75 period, Allen concluded.

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Former HMB Staff Member
Directs Student Interns

3/3/70

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Paul Adkins, former secretary of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's department of Christian social ministries in Atlanta, recently assumed the directorship of the missionary intern program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is also completing work on his doctor's degree and teaching in the social work department at the seminary.

Adkin's responsibilities include recruiting and counseling students interested in full-time mission work. He attempts to interpret service opportunities offered through the board.

The intern program provides practical experience for students and relieves the work load of missionaries, Adkins said. The program is active also at other Southern Baptist seminaries.

Students work 20 hours a week and receive \$120 a month from the Home Mission Board. They are appointed through the department of missionary personnel. New Orleans Seminary now has eight students working in various Baptist Good Will Centers.

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Adkins assumes his new position with an extensive background in social ministries. He was director of the department of aging for Buckner Baptist Benevolences in Dallas, before going to Atlanta. More recently he has been director of the program for aging in Florida.

The Kentucky native is a graduate of Los Angeles Baptist College in Newhall, Calif., and holds a master's degree in social work from the Carver School of Missions and Social Work, Louisville.

He has attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Kent School of Social Work of the University of Louisville.

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253 Families in India Get
Homes With BWA Relief Aid

3/3/70

VELLORE, India (BP)--New homes have been provided for 253 Telugu-speaking families who were victims of cyclones in southern India through funds provided by Baptist World Alliance members in America and Europe.

The cyclone victims were aided by the socio-economic projects division of the Convention of Telugu Baptist Churches, according to a report from P. Sadhu Samuel, a Baptist leader in India.

Samuel said that 106 well projects for irrigation have also been developed with Baptist World Alliance assistance, with hopes for an additional 200 well projects in 1970. Most of the work is designed to help the poorest of the people in the villages.

"These well projects and other self-help projects permit these people to help themselves and to be self-reliant," said Samuel. "It is so gratifying to see them working on these projects which they know are their own.

"They sing as they work," Samuel related. "We tell them, 'Sing your way to self-reliance.'"

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12,000 Register for Religious,
Patriotic Texas Music Marathon

3/3/70

FORT WORTH (BP)--More than 12,000 participants have registered for a Religious and Patriotic Music Marathon, "Festival of Praise," sponsored by the church music department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, on March 6.

The extravaganza at the Tarrant County Convention Center here will feature choirs from 250 Baptist churches throughout the state, Texas Baptist colleges, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, here.

In addition, 21 bell choirs will participate, directed by Saxe Adams, consultant in the church music department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville.

The combined choirs, singing "The Star Spangled Banner" and "The Lord's Prayer" will be directed by Don Hustad of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

New York Metropolitan Opera Stars Dean Wilder and Robert Hale will also be featured soloists.

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C O R R E C T I O N

On BP story mailed 2/27/70 headlined: "Nixon Pledges Support to Catholic Educators," please change graph 3 line 1 to read: He continued: "You cannot retreat, you must not retreat. The word not was left out.

Thanks

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