



BAPTIST PRESS

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October 22, 1970

Birmingham Church Accepts Resignations of 11 Staffers

BIRMINGHAM (BP)--After members of the First Baptist Church here voted to accept the resignations of the pastor and youth director who had declared they would not serve a "racist church," nine other church staff members resigned in support of the pastor.

The resignations of Herbert Gilmore as pastor and Miss Betty Bock as youth director were accepted in a regular quarterly church business meeting.

Both had publicly announced their resignations, effective Nov. 1 on Sept. 27 when the church denied membership to two Negro applicants, Mrs. Winifred Bryant and her 11-year-old daughter, Twila.

The church, however, took no action on their resignations that Sunday, after attorney Ollie Blan, who had previously supported a move to fire the two, had objected, saying the resignations were ill-timed.

Deacons in the church recommended that the two resignations be accepted but proposed that the effective date for the pastor's resignation be changed from Nov. 1 to Oct. 31.

Robert Sanders, chairman of the deacons, said some of the deacons felt the church would be liable for another month's salary if Gilmore were to preach on Sunday, Nov. 1. Miss Bock immediately asked that her resignation be changed to the same date, Oct. 31.

The church debated whether to change the effective dates of resignation for about 15 minutes, but Gilmore asked that the debate be ended and the motion be approved.

The pastor said he felt there were three main reasons for changing the date: (1) to prevent another month's salary, (2) the racists in the church didn't want to hear another of his sermons, and (3) they wanted the record to imply he was fired.

After the church voted to accept the two resignations, one by one nine other staff members of the church submitted their resignations. All were accepted.

Resigning were the associate pastor, minister of education, associate pastor-minister of music, education secretary, youth secretary, music secretary, pianist, organist, and associate organist.

In offering his resignation, associate pastor-minister of music John Sims said that the church's dilemma "is not simply a matter of differing man-made opinions as to program and function, but the profound matter of understanding of, and commitment to Christ, his church and his gospel.

"The principle and practice of the democratic procedure," Sims continued, "has placed the leadership of this church in the hands of those who hold radically different views than my own as to the nature and purpose of Christ's church. I cannot in good conscience continue to serve...."

Minister of Education Carlisle Driggers said he could not continue on the staff "due to the closed membership policy the church recently adopted."

Mack Goss, associate pastor, told the church he had joined the staff greatly impressed with the leadership of the pastor, and the church's commitment to stay downtown and minister to the racially and economically-changing neighborhood. Goss said he never dreamed the church would make some of the decisions it had made.

The controversy attracted national headlines beginning last July when Mrs. Bryant and Twila, involved in the church through a neighborhood tutoring project, sought membership in the all-white congregation. Their application was contested, and a final vote, requiring a two-thirds margin to pass, was delayed for two months.

During this period, a motion was made to fire both Gilmore and Miss Bock, and later amended to include the three other ministers on the staff, but the motion was defeated by a vote of 237-241, a margin of four votes.

Also during the two month period, the church defeated a motion by a vote of 240-217 proposing that all membership applicants, Gilmore and Miss Bock submitted their resignations, and about 300 members walked out of the church "in moral protest."

Calling themselves "the Company of the Committed," those who walked out pledged to designate their tithes and offerings to take care of the financial needs of the staff members and to dedicate their efforts to building a new fellowship.

Though a new church has not been formed by those who walked out, the question has been discussed openly and thoroughly. No decision has yet been made, however.

The group has also discussed the possibility of temporarily continuing their membership in the downtown church, but meeting early Sunday morning for worship led by Gilmore, they would then go to Sunday School at the church where 90 per cent of the leadership positions are held by members of the "Company of the Committed."

It was reported that on one Sunday, the offerings for the "Company of the Committed" totalled about \$4,000, compared to about \$600 for the First Baptist Church.

Contacted by Baptist Press, Gilmore said he had no specific plans for the future, but added he hopes "there is a pulpit somewhere in the Southern Baptist Convention that wants a pastor who will try to make Christ the Lord of all of life, whether it be in the economic, social, political or spiritual spheres."

Gilmore said he had been asked to write a book on the church's problems, and that he has been considering entitling the book: "They Chose to Die"--a title that would describe both the racists and the "Company of the Committed," he said.

Gilmore added that "the thing that has killed us" is that the leaders of the church who are dedicated and committed are outnumbered by the people whose names are on the church rolls, but only attend "when it comes time to vote against the Niggers."

During the business session of the church in which the resignations of the staff members were accepted, a motion was made by B. C. Cowart stating that "the Company of the Committed" not be recognized as an official body of First Baptist Church, and that they be denied permission to use any of the church buildings or property for their meetings.

The business meeting, however, adjourned without taking action on Cowart's motion. It was late, and the members had earlier spent an hour debating whether or not to read the minutes of the previous business meeting. Those who favored dispensing with reading the minutes argued it would take 5½ hours just to read the document.

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Georgia Baptist Committee
Endorses State Amendments

10/22/70

ATLANTA (BP)--Three proposed Georgia constitutional amendments, one of them providing grants to students attending private colleges and universities, were endorsed by the public affairs committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention here.

The committee said that in their judgment, "the cherished church-state separation principle would not be violated by implementing these provisions."

Two of the amendments had to do with exemptions from ad valorem taxation for property, including automobiles, owned by religious institutions; and for property owned by all hospitals and nursing homes.

The scholarship amendment would make it possible for Georgia citizens to attend private colleges and universities, including those owned and operated by religious bodies at the same cost they would spend on education at tax-supported colleges.

Backers of the plan say it would ease the load being carried by schools in the University system of the state.

The amendment would authorize the General Assembly to provide the procedures for making such grants or scholarships and to provide appropriations for such purposes.

Members of the Georgia Baptist committee said they had "studied these three proposed amendments and have concluded that in our judgment the cherished church-state separation principle would not be violated by implementing these provisions."

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FORT WORTH (BP)--Buryl Red, nationally-known composer, conductor and arranger of religious music who recently started his own New York-based production and publishing company, has been retained by the Southern Baptist Radio-Television Commission as a consultant in music.

Red, former music editor for Holt, Rinehart and Winston Publishing Co in New York, will be primarily responsible for musical direction of the Centurymen, a 100-voice men's choir organized by the commission to record its music and represent the denomination in concerts and television appearances. It is composed of ministers of music for Southern Baptist churches.

Red will also consult on film, television and radio productions for the commission, according to Paul M. Stevens, director of the agency.

The new firm Red heads, called Generic Music, is under contract for a number of companies to produce records, film scores, radio and TV commercials and other materials.

Red, who has degrees from Baylor University and Yale University, has served several other Southern Baptist boards and agencies.

He records music published in four magazines distributed by the denomination's Sunday School Board, and was music director for "Mission 70," a joint project of the SBC Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission, and Woman's Missionary Union. His work for "Mission 70" included writing the musical, "Hello World."

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Miller Named Alabama Baptist
Church Training Consultant

10/22/70

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--R. Kenneth Miller of Birmingham has been elected a consultant in the church training department of the Alabama Baptist State Convention's Executive Board effective Nov. 1.

For the past two years, Miller has been director of young people's work and recreation in the church training department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, Jackson.

A native of Alabama, he is a graduate of Samford University, Birmingham, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has been pastor of Baptist churches in Alabama and Mississippi, and has been youth director for two churches in Birmingham.

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