

**BAPTIST PRESS**

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**First Baptist Astronaut
Leaves "Witness" on Moon**

CAPE KENNEDY, Fla. (BP)--Astronaut James B. Irwin, expected to be the first Southern Baptist to walk on the moon, blasted off from Cape Kennedy in Apollo 15 with plans to leave a witness for his church on the moon.

Lt. Col. Irwin, a member of Nassau Bay Baptist Church near the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, took with him in Apollo 15 two photographed copies of a banner from his church.

He planned to leave one on the moon and return the other for reproduction and distribution to church members.

The banner includes a picture of the church; the slogan, "Things Happen at Nassau Bay Baptist Church;" the inscription, "Our prayers go with the crew of Apollo 15; the crew members' names; and the signatures of all those present at the church on James Irwin Day."

On that day at the church, Irwin gave his testimony four times--three times to Sunday School assemblies and once before the entire church. Mrs. Irwin, an active Seventh-Day Adventist, also gave her testimony, asking for the congregation's prayer.

Standing in the V.I.P. viewing stand outside Mission Control here as the 36-story spacecraft blasted off were W. H. (Bill) Rittenhouse, pastor of the Nassau Bay Baptist Church in Houston and Jack U. Harwell, editor of the Christian Index in Atlanta, Ga..

"As Apollo 15 broke loose from its umbilical cord and supporting gantry and slowly began to mount toward the heavens on its tremendous cushion of flame and smoke, Dr. Rittenhouse and his wife were openly weeping in prayer and compassion that everything would go right for the moon mission and for the three men sitting atop the giant missile," Harwell wrote in a first-person editorial following the blastoff.

"You could actually feel the concern and pastoral care emanating from this man of God as he begged the Lord out loud to "Get Apollo going," Harwell observed.

He added that the Houston pastor shouted, as if Irwin and the crew could hear, "Do it well, Jim," and "Be A-OK, you big bird."

At one point during the launch, Harwell said, the voice of Mission Control instructed the astronauts to cut free a safety mechanism, telling them to "abort the safety mechanism," Rittenhouse's face suddenly went pale, thinking that something had gone wrong and the mission had been aborted.

"Tears streamed down the face of almost everyone in our group," Harwell wrote. "We had agonized with a compassionate pastor for his parishioner and his teammates in a moment of indescribable danger and tension."

In an interview with the Baptist Standard before the blastoff, Rittenhouse called Irwin "one of the most dedicated, solid Christian men you'd find anywhere."

"He is dedicated to the study of God's word, faithful in his testimony and witness," the pastor said.

Upon his return from the moon mission and subsequent assignment to NASA headquarters in Houston, Irwin will witness the baptism of his 10-year-old daughter, Jill, who made a profession of faith on "James Irwin Day" at the church.

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Her baptism is scheduled Oct. 24, the first day Rittenhouse is sure that Irwin will be back. Jimmy R. Allen of San Antonio, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, is to speak and Metropolitan Opera star Jerome Hines is to sing on that Sunday.

Irwin is one of two astronauts who are members of the Nassau Bay Baptist Church. Lt. Col. Bill Pogue, also a member of the Houston church, is scheduled to participate in the Apollo 17 Sky Lab project in early 1973 when the United States puts a scientific laboratory into orbit.

It was Pogue who obtained the official invitations to Rittenhouse and Harwell to attend the launching of Apollo 15 and watch it from the V.I.P. Viewing Stand.

Harwell called the experience of watching Irwin and the crew blast off, and his pastor's reactions as "one of life's unforgettable moments."

"We later thought and talked of all the pastors we had known across the years who also cared deeply and continuously for all the sheep and their flocks and who weep and agonized daily for the earthly dangers faced every hour by their congregations," Harwell wrote in the editorial.

"In that moment, we sensed anew something of the purpose of God as he sent his own caring and sharing Son down to this busy planet to weep and suffer and die for his sheep who so desperately need a shepherd in their many moments of uncharted adventure across the planet earth.

"In that precious moment which is burned into our souls for eternity," Harwell concluded, "we made a new commitment to the God of the universe, the earth and the moon and everything around them; and to the pastors and churches who serve that God here on our unit of the solar system; and to the millions of hurting souls around this planet who are in daily danger of eternal damnation or temporary aloneness without our Saviour or without a compassionate pastor or Christian friend."

Meanwhile, Irwin and David R. Scott, a lay reader in the Episcopal Church, were preparing for a ride in the lunar dune buggy called Rover 1 during three days of exploration. Alfred M. Worden, a Catholic, will orbit overhead.

Scott and Irwin, who have been nicknamed "the Rover boys," will drive a total of 22 miles on the lunar surface during the three days, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, July 31, Aug. 1 and 2.

"It will be quite an interesting day in our church Sunday," Rittenhouse quipped. "One of our members will be out for a Sunday drive...on the moon."

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Compiled from reports by Larry Jerden of the Baptist Standard and Jack Harwell of the Christian Index.

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Committee Recommends Texas
Hospitals Get Federal Grants

7/28/71

DALLAS (BP)--A special hospital study committee has recommended that the Baptist General Convention of Texas allow its nine hospitals to accept federal grants and low interest loans to offset the difference between federal payments for services to government patients and the cost of providing the services.

After a year's study, the 58-man committee also recommended that the Texas Baptist Executive Board be empowered to release a hospital in case a financial emergency would necessitate such action before the next annual session. It would be a last resort,

The committee also recommended that hospitals be allowed to add a minority of non-Baptists to their boards of trustees to broaden badly needed community support.

The recommendations must be approved in September by the Texas Convention's Executive Board, which formed the study committee and the annual session in Houston, Oct. 26-28.

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Previous annual convention sessions have ruled decisively against acceptance of any federal aid by its institutions, expressing fear that such aid would open the door to federal control.

The committee's report said that convention policy on church-state separation has been "valid up to this point and this committee is not taking issue with this position."

Noting that the situation in the health care field has changed "markedly" with "intrusion" of the government, the report said that hospitals now "are virtually dominated in their policies and practices by federal regulations."

Boone Powell, executive director of Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas, has this explanation:

"Our hospital has to answer to more than 180 agencies of various descriptions. Only one of these is the Baptist General Convention of Texas. If we took \$10 million in federal aid today, we would not add even one more federal regulation. All hospitals, under law, are already under governmental control."

The report indicated that unless the convention approves the recommendations on federal assistance, the hospitals may lose quality or become insolvent. A consequence of that would be withdrawal from the convention, which the committee and hospital officials said they hope to avoid.

The report noted that the government pays for services in two ways.

One is a cost formula, which covers only what the government calls "allowable costs" for federal patients and makes little allowance for capital costs, such as new equipment, modernization of facilities, expansion, start-up costs for new services or mortgage payments.

The other method of payment--grants and low interest loans, which Texas Baptist institutions may not now accept--is designed to help pay for these capital costs.

With 30-40 per cent of their patients under Medicare, Medicaid or some other federally mandated programs, the report said, "Texas Baptist hospitals are incurring added capital cost to service government patients without government participation in these costs.

"To receive less than full payment for patient services is to subsidize the federal government," the report said.

The recommendation concerning release from convention control stipulates that before any institution is released, appropriate convention officials be authorized to negotiate a contract "to conduct chaplaincy programs, education and other such activities that the convention from time to time may desire to sponsor."

Addition of non-Baptists trustees, not now allowed under convention policy, would be limited to one-fourth of the trustees on the board of a given hospital. It would require a constitutional change which must pass two annual convention sessions before taking effect.

The special study committee was formed at the request of the Texas Baptist Human Welfare Commission.