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November 1, 1971

**Four Teenage Girls Killed  
In Indiana Church Bus Crash**

**EAST GARY, Ind. (BP)--**Four teenage girls were killed and six passengers injured when a freight train struck a church bus carrying children to the First Baptist Church here.

The accident occurred four blocks from the church, just prior to Sunday School time on Oct. 31.

The train struck the bus just behind the right side door and dragged the bus about 900 feet down the track.

Police said that the crossing, which is located on a curve, is not equipped with guards or flashing lights. Houses partially obscure the raised tracks.

The driver of the bus, Joseph E. Spanos, 34, was in intensive care at a Gary hospital, suffering internal, back and leg injuries. Three other children were in Gary hospitals. Two were treated and released.

Killed in the crash were Elizabeth Miller, 17; Donna Breckman, 13; Becky Tucker, 13; and Marilee Meler, nine.

Miss Miller and Miss Tucker were members of the church. Miss Miller had returned the previous night from a statewide Acteen Houseparty in Bloomington, Ind. Miss Miller and Miss Meler were not related, although initial news reports indicated they were sisters.

It was the third time that Miss Breckman had gone to the church's Sunday School on the church bus. She and Miss Meler were not church members.

Witnesses said that the church bus did not stop at the railroad crossing. State police pointed out that Indiana law does not require church buses to stop at railroad crossings, as is required of school buses.

State Senator Eugene Bainbridge of Munster, Ind., said shortly after the accident that he would introduce a bill in the next session of the legislature requiring church buses to stop at railroad crossings.

He said it was a shame that it takes a tragedy to point out inadequacies in the law.

The 762-member church is one of the largest Southern Baptist congregations in the state. It operates two buses to transport persons attending Sunday School classes. Malone Cochran is pastor.

**Texas Baptists Approve  
Church Staff Info Service**

11/1/71

**HOUSTON (BP)--**The Baptist General Convention of Texas has approved employment of a coordinator of counseling services for ministers and their families and establishment of a computerized church staff information service.

The action came, with little or no opposition, at the 86th annual session of the Texas convention here. Messengers approved a comprehensive report of a pastoral care committee appointed after the 1970 convention.

The coordinator of counseling would be charged with establishment of a network of properly trained and accredited counselors across Texas to whom he could refer cases of pastors and church staffers in need of assistance.

The information service would be contracted with Membership Services, Inc., of Irving, Tex., to provide biographical and other information for mutual assistance of churches and church staffers.

Membership Services, Inc., is the same company which works with the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in some of its direct church programs.

The seven-member pastoral care committee based the need for the counseling and information services on an extensive survey of pastors, church staffers and associational missionaries in Texas, studies of what other denominations are doing, widespread interviews across the Southern Baptist Convention.

"This (research) led to an awareness of a growing crisis of unprecedented proportions in church staff unrest not only in Texas but all across the Southern Baptist Convention," the committee's report said.

"Many of our ministers and their families today are in dire need of professional counsel and are unable to afford it, or they are caught in the crossfires of misunderstanding and in the tensions of a lonely calling."

A survey of Texas pastors and church staff members showed that 57 per cent of those responding felt that they or some immediate family member had needed, or now needed, counseling; 31 per cent have seriously considered leaving the ministry; 89 per cent felt the denomination should consider providing help for ministers with problems.

The majority favored psychological counseling, but, said the committee, "running a significant second . . . was a request for help in changing fields of service."

The coordinator would be responsible to the Texas convention's executive secretary, but would work from an office outside the Baptist Building in Dallas. "He must not be so involved in denominational structure as to make him unapproachable," the committee explained.

Included in the report approved by the messengers would be financial assistance by the convention to help those unable to afford therapy and to keep them in the counseling situation until counseling goals had been reached.

"All of us are committed to the biblical and personal thrust of determining God's will and power through prayer," the committee said. "Many among us cannot understand that a minister is unable to solve all his personal frustrations through prayer and Bible study.

"Yet, the issue remains, substantiated by unyielding fact" that dire need exists for assistance in changing fields of service and psychological counseling, the report said.

Complicating the issue, the committee said, is fear of ostracism of those admitting to these needs.

"It is a sad commentary on our fragmented fellowship that our Christian community cannot enfold in love, understanding, and forgiveness our brothers in Christ who need encouragement, freedom and identity," the committee said.

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Little Rock Church Buys  
Hotel for Retirement Home

11/1/71

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Second Baptist Church here has purchased the Albert Pike Hotel adjacent to the church with plans to operate it as a retirement home.

Dale Cowling, pastor of the church, announced the purchase of the hotel in a press conference at the hotel. Also participating were Houston Burford, general manager of Southwest Hotels, Inc., which owned the hotel; and Lyndell Lay, an investment banker, deacon at the church, and chairman of the committee which negotiated the purchase.

The hotel building includes 192 rooms in 175 units, 36 of which are apartments of one or more rooms.

A five-year option on the hotel's parking garage and a vacant parking lot were included in the transaction. Also included in the five-year option were the Lanai Suites, part of a recently-constructed addition overlooking the hotel swimming pool. Southwest Hotels retains the right to lease the suites during the five-year option period.

The main structure was purchased for \$405,000. Of that amount, \$150,000 had been contributed by one anonymous donor, Cowling said. Southwest Hotels will carry the balance, to be amortized in 20 years from income.

Cowling said the church plans to charge the retirement home tenants rents of from \$20 to \$25 a room per week, an amount that may be adjusted upward or downward.

Cowling added that the objective would not be to make a profit, but to operate the facility as another ministry of the church, providing a place where persons "can live out their lives with a sense of dignity and comfort and a properly balanced diet."

Cowling said that the church planned to lease the hotel's food service facility and that a special rate of \$3.00 a day for meals would apply to residents. The dining facilities will also remain open to the public.

The hotel, built in 1927, now has 42 permanent residents who are expected to remain under the new arrangement.

The cost of the main building and all of the options would total about \$740,000, Cowling said. All of the property will remain subject to real estate taxes and any income earned would be subject to income taxes, he further explained.

Acquisition of the hotel itself brings to about \$3 million the value of the real estate now owned by Second Baptist Church. Should the options be exercised, the church would own all of the block bounded by East Seventh, East Eighth, Scott, and Cumberland streets.

The church, which has 2,861 members and is officially committed to continuing downtown as well as county-wide ministries, also owns two thirds of the block opposite the church on East Eighth, now used for parking.

The church will employ its own manager and will operate a program of activities "designed to appeal to older persons." According to Cowling, as many as possible of the hotel's current staff of 80 will be retained.