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Conference on Aging
Urges Spiritual Well-Being

WASHINGTON (BP)--Government and religious organizations should cooperate to assure that the spiritual well-being of all citizens be fulfilled, according to recommendations from the White House Conference on Aging here.

The conference section on "Spiritual Well-Being" declared that to provide for the physical material and social needs of man apart from his spiritual needs "is to fail to understand both the meaning of God and the meaning of man."

The section further declared "that all policies, programs and activities recommended in a national policy on aging should be so developed that the spiritual well-being of all citizens should be fulfilled."

Recommendations from the section on "Spiritual Well-Being", one of 14 divisions of the White House meeting, will be presented to President Nixon shortly.

The scores of recommendations cover a wide range of issues relating to aging, from income, housing, nutrition and health to transportation and employment opportunities.

President Nixon addressed about 4,000 participants on the final day of the conference, promising to give "close, personal attention" to all the recommendations from the meeting.

This is the second White House Conference on Aging to be held. The first took place in 1961.

Two Southern Baptist leaders participated in the discussions on "Spiritual Well-Being." Searcy S. Garrison, executive secretary of the Georgia Baptist Convention, attended as an appointee of the governor of Georgia. Miss Adelle Carson, consultant in the adult section of the church training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, represented that agency at the five-day meeting.

Miss Violet Rudd, executive director of American Baptist Women, served as recorder in one of the subsections studying spiritual well-being. Miss Rudd also participated in the task force preparing advance study papers for the conferees.

In calling for cooperation between government and religious groups, the section insisted that the principle of separation of church and state should be preserved.

After taking this precaution, the conference plunged headlong into a series of proposals directed to government, local communities, and the churches.

For one thing, the section said that government should "provide financial assistance for the training of clergy, professional workers, and volunteers to develop special understanding and competency in satisfying the spiritual needs of the aging."

Another proposal was that all licensing agencies of the state should require that institution caring for the aging must provide adequate chaplaincy services. If this cannot be done through the financial cooperation of the church organizations in the community, the section said, the government should be empowered to provide the funds.

The spiritual well-being of the aging encompasses both individual and group programming, the section's report indicated. In providing for these services, the conference strongly urged "that special attention should be given to allowing older persons to share in the planning and implementation of all programs related to them."

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Among other recommendations concerning the spiritual well-being of the aging were the following:

--Religious bodies should be actively concerned not only with the spiritual well-being of the aging, but also for their personal, physical and social well-being.

--Religious bodies should exercise a strong advocacy role in working for programs, both private and public, to meet the needs of the aging.

--Religious bodies should work together on an inter-faith basis to help provide for the needs of the aging.

--Religious bodies and government should affirm the right to, and reverence for life, and should recognize the individual's right to die with dignity.

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Group Asks for Conference on Spiritual Well-Being of Elderly

WASHINGTON (BP)--A group of religious leaders and lay persons from major denominations met in a special session during the White House Conference on Aging and agreed to ask the White House to call a national conference to deal specifically with the spiritual well-being of elderly persons.

Claiming that spiritual needs must be a prime consideration in all programs relating to the elderly, the special group studying the role of the religious community and the aging requested that such a meeting be called within two to five years to follow up the recent conference, the second to be held in a decade. The first convened in 1961.

Meeting in a five-hour session on a day devoted in the conference to "special concerns," the religious leaders spent most of their time discussing and passing recommendations to make directly to denominations and local churches.

A complete report of their session will be made available to religious groups, according to William C. Fitch, director of the National Council on the Aging, Washington, D. C. Fitch presided over the special session.

Among the recommendations to denominations, the group of about 100 voted to ask national religious bodies and other private agencies to make it "national policy" to provide inter-faith, multi-purpose community centers at the local level.

In discussing such community centers, the conferees suggested that church facilities should be made available, for little or no fee, for day care for elderly persons, senior cooperatives, services such as meals on wheels, a wide range of medical services in which volunteers from the medical profession could be used, and for programs of continuing education.

"Dedicated, willing volunteers are available in greater numbers through religious bodies and private agencies more than from any other organizations," the group declared. "They should be motivated and involved."

In other recommendations, the conferees asked Congress for legislation that would deny tax exemption to religious and charitable organizations that discriminate in the admission to their programs of black persons and those of other minority groups.

The vote on this recommendation was strong, with some clergymen saying that it would help them in urging local congregations to change their policies.

The special session on the religious community and aging spent a large portion of the time discussing the need to change prevailing attitudes among church people toward aging and the aged person.

A clergyman who also is a government employee with a federal agency on aging deplored the poor attitudes among ministers themselves to elderly persons. Several persons spoke of the need for seminaries to offer more courses on gerontology, the study of problems of aging.

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In another recommendation to the President --a suggestion directed more to religious institutions than to the government --the conferees asked that church-related educational institutions "be urged to provide a knowledge base for an understanding of the processes of aging, the characteristics and needs of older persons, and the implications of such knowledge for the fields of community practice."

Over and over in the five-hour meeting, spokesmen urged that churches help elderly individuals to remain in their own communities, if possible, instead of entering nursing homes.

"The institutional setting will not bring about spiritual well-being" as such, declared Herbert C. Lazenby, a minister and director of Senior Centers, Inc., Seattle, Wash.

-30-

Baptist Caucus Plans for Consultation on Aging

By Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--Fourteen Baptists representing the American and Southern Baptist Conventions met for dinner during the White House Conference on Aging and agreed to plan a joint conference to bring together workers in the two conventions who have special concerns for the aging.

At the suggestion of Don Crosby, a staff member of the Social Action Division of the Home Mission Society of the American Baptist Convention, a strategy session to make plans will be held in early 1972. Paul R. Adkins, secretary of the department of Christian social ministries of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, will help coordinate the plans.

At the dinner, presided over by W. L. Howse III of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the Baptist participants in the White House Conference on Aging shared reactions to the five-day meeting and their hopes for expanded church ministries in the field of aging.

The responsibility of religious groups to change attitudes toward elderly persons both in and out of the churches was a special concern.

"Our attitude about aging is terrible, and our attitude toward aging is terrible," declared Leonard Hill, managing editor of the Baptist Program, a publication of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, Nashville.

"We are guilty of the sin of omission concerning the elderly," said John Bloskas of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, Dallas. Bloskas, suggesting that Baptists start referring to the aging as those from 40 and up, urged that denominations and churches plan extensive "pre-retirement advising" for persons in this age group.

Miss Violet Rudd, executive director of American Baptist Women, regretted that churches do not have more varied programs for aging persons. "We have an excellent variety of programs from birth to 20 years," Miss Rudd pointed out. "But from 20 years on it is the same in most churches."

"We need to develop pastors and people with a better attitude toward death," suggested William P. Harris, administrator of the Baptist Home in the District of Columbia and an officer in both the ABC and SBC associations of managers of homes for the aged. Harris expressed concern also that Baptist homes provide more community services for aging persons.

"Churches must do everything possible to help individuals maintain their own household in the community," Harris urged. He pointed out that local churches need a "vigorous, aggressive program of giving information" and should provide counseling services to the aging on available community services.

Harris further urged that Baptists change their concept on homes for the aged from thinking that such places are "terminal" to accepting them as "rehabilitative."

Adkins, a specialist in the field who has taught a number of courses in the subject of gerontology, discussed the charge that many clergymen lack healthy attitudes toward elderly persons. He pointed out that a basic characteristic of elderly persons is loneliness. "We don't want to deal with this, so we reject it and them," Adkins observed.

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Adkins suggested that Southern Baptists need "an active aggressive program" to recruit young persons to careers in the field of aging.

Miss Adelle Carlson, a consultant in the adult section of the church training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, and Charles Oehring, a curriculum writer for the American Baptist Convention, agreed that more materials should be developed especially for and about the elderly. Such curricula could help change attitudes, they stated.

A number of Southern Baptist participants in the White House meeting expressed frustration over the lack of involvement of pastors and leadership from the denomination.

Rudy Sanchez, pastor of the First Mexican Baptist Church of Dallas, said he especially regretted that pastors were not informed of the meeting and were not present at the conference. He suggested that the denomination's Home Mission Board and the Christian Life Commission get information to pastors about future meetings of this sort.

Archie Ellis, former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, S. C., and now director of the South Carolina Department of Public Welfare, suggested that pastors and denominational leaders must get involved on the local and state level in the commissions on aging. This is where the planning is being done, and this is where Baptist input can be made, Ellis explained.

One state executive secretary, Searcy S. Garrison of the Georgia Baptist Convention, attended the White House Conference as an appointee of the governor of that state. Garrison has been active in the Georgia Commission on Aging and participated in state meetings preparing for the national conference, which brought 3,500 delegates to the nation's capital.

Garrison described "agism" (a new word coined at the conference) as "a social problem of serious proportions." He praised the national conference as "a wholesome meeting" and said he expected "constructive legislation and creative programs of service to follow" from religious bodies, churches, private agencies and the government.

"It is my hope," Garrison said, "that Southern Baptist pastors and church leaders as well as denominational leaders on the national and state levels, will take a new look at their programs designed to minister to and involve the elderly in services, and that they will improve upon those ministries."

Garrison, a member of the conference section on spiritual well-being, was the author of a resolution to offer employment opportunities without age discrimination. His recommendation, which was approved by a subsection of the conference, also proposed that limitations be removed on the amount a person can earn without reducing Social Security benefits.

Almost all those who attended the unofficial "Baptist caucus" at the White House Conference on Aging expressed the belief that was heard again and again in official sessions: if anything is done to change attitudes toward aging, the church must have a big part in doing it.

Crosby, one of the American Baptist delegates, summed it up by saying he saw the church as one group in the whole spectrum of agencies ministering to the aging. "But it is the only group," he pointed out, "dealing with everybody from birth to death."

