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**Miccosukee Indians Get
First Church in History**

By Adon Taft
Religion Editor, Miami Herald

MIAMI (BP)--The Miccosukee Indians along the Tamiami Trail in the Forty-Mile Bend area at the tip of Florida just got their first church--the Indian Trail Baptist Chapel.

Concern for the Indians is considered to be the "in" thing in American Society, although their spiritual welfare has been a concern of the church since Spanish explorers and Catholic priests came here four centuries ago.

The Miccosukee Indians, however, never before had their own church. Now they have a \$65,000 sanctuary which can seat 150 worshippers. The building has an Indian flavor, with its use of coral rock and natural wood in the A-frame structure. The design suggests the shape of a wigwam, but it looks nothing like the Miccosukee's "chickee."

That's one reason most of the 450 Miccosukees look upon Christianity as "the white man's religion," according to Buffalo Tiger, chairman of the tribe, who considers himself a Baptist.

Baptists have sponsored almost all Christian work among the Indians in South Florida in the last century, with the exception of the 30-year effort of an Episcopal deaconess which ended in 1960.

However, it was other Indians who brought Christianity to the Miccosukees, noted Genus E. Crenshaw, a Baptist missionary who has worked among the Indians in South Florida for 20 years.

"The early missionaries among the Seminoles here were Creek Indians from Oklahoma," he said. They were Baptists who in 1907 began their work among the Seminoles on the Hollywood reservation where just over 300 Indians now live.

"Christianity always has had a good reception among the Seminoles, but it was very slow work until the 1940s," explained Crenshaw.

Most of that early work was on an unorganized, personal basis among Indians meeting in their "chickees," hut-like dwellings on stilts. The first organized church for Indians in Florida was established on the Hollywood reservation in 1936.

Today about half the 1,050 Seminoles at Hollywood, Big Cypress, and Brighton reservations are professing Christians, reported Crenshaw, and they have three churches of their own--First Seminole Baptist Church at Hollywood, the Big Cypress Baptist Church, and the First Indian Baptist Church in Brighton, Fla.

The Miccosukees organized as a tribe separate from the Seminoles in 1962. Some of their members had become Christians through the witness of the Seminoles.

About 25 of those Christians now live along the Trail and they now have their own church, thanks to the concern of the Miami Springs Baptist Church with some help from the Florida Baptist Convention and the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Miami Springs Baptist Church got involved with the Indians through one of its deacons, Dr. Billy P. Rentz, a physician who has served the Seminoles and Miccosukees under government contract since 1947. Before that, his father had been the doctor for the Indians since 1935.

"There is only one medicine man left among the Seminoles," reported Dr. Rentz. "He's about 85 years old and lives at Big Cypress."

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The Indians today are most receptive to medical care, he said. They suffer from the same diseases as other people in South Florida, but they have more upper respiratory problems and intestinal parasites because of their exposure and environment. "But those are pretty much under control," he added.

However, it was his treatment of the Miccosukees at Baptist Hospital that led directly to the new Indian Trail Baptist Chapel which was dedicated recently in services conducted by Hankins F. Parker, pastor of the Miami Springs Baptist Church.

"When the Indians began coming to the Baptist Hospital in 1965, many of them were becoming interested in Christianity through the witness of the staff and the literature there," explained Dr. Rentz. "But the Miccosukees complained that they had no church where they could follow up in practice what they learned."

As early as 1963 Crenshaw had been looking for property for a chapel in the Forty-Mile Bend area. But those efforts were redoubled when Dr. Rentz reported the interest of the Miccosukees in having a church of their own.

Property just was not available in the area because of the prospect of the new jet airport being built in the vicinity. But in the first of what Parker describes as "miracles," Malcolm Wiseheart, a Presbyterian businessman, donated the land for the chapel.

Then the government declared a moratorium on building in the area while the ecology of the area was studied. The moratorium is still in force, but in another "miracle" worked by Congressman Claude Pepper, with the aid of three Metro (Miami) commissioners and various county and federal departments, permission was granted for the construction of the chapel.

Much of that effort was spurred by the plea of 10-year-old Spencer Tiger, youngest of five children of Louise Tiger. When his father was in Baptist Hospital as the result of an automobile accident, Spencer was impressed with the chapel there. He kept pleading with Dr. Rentz to help get one for the Miccosukees so he could go to Sunday School like he had when he lived on the Seminole reservation in Hollywood.

Dr. Rentz presented the key to the new chapel to Spencer, a fourth-grader at Flagami Elementary School, during the dedication ceremonies.

Buffalo Tiger, who is Spencer's uncle and who also is a member of the Florida Commission on Human Rights, said the Miccosukees welcome the new church although it is considered by many to be an adoption of the white man's ways.

"Indians don't feel the need for a preacher, or buildings for worship," he explained. "They believe God is in their hut and outdoors all the time."

The native religion is very similar to Christianity, Tiger pointed out. It includes a belief in the "Breath-maker" who made man from dust. The Indians believe there was a good man who lived on earth, still lives here in spirit, and is coming back again physically. They believe in heaven and hell and that those who find their way to heaven find it by an inner light.

"They don't jump at Christianity," observed Crenshaw, "but once they're convinced that Christ is the Savior, they respond."

More and more Christ is being preached to them in English, he said, because most of the young Indians learn only English. However, the Wycliffe Bible translators are working on Miccosukee, the language spoken among all the Indians except those at Brighton, where they speak Creek. It is an unwritten language.

The Seminoles have produced their own preachers, including three well-known preachers who recently resigned or died after serving for many years at the churches in Big Cypress, Brighton and Hollywood. Two lay pastors are now leading churches at Big Cypress and Brighton.

The new Indian Trail Baptist Chapel is holding services led by Dr. Rentz and R. C. Ray, missions committee chairman for the Miami Springs Baptist Church. The members, as well as the Southern Baptists involved, hope for the day when the church will have its own Miccosukee pastor, just as it now has its own building.

Jesus People Leaders Carry
Cross in Germany, British Isles

By the Baptist Press

Two young Southern Baptist evangelists, both considered leaders of the Jesus Movement, have returned from separate trips to Germany and to the British Isles, where they carried crosses in an effort to bring the Jesus Movement to Germany, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Both Arthur Blessitt, Baptist evangelist sometimes called the minister to Sunset Strip in Hollywood, and Sammy Tippit, who leads a ministry to street people in Chicago called "God's Love in Action," described response to their efforts in the four countries as "fantastic" during telephone interviews with Baptist Press.

Blessitt, who gained national exposure last year with a march across the United States carrying a cross and by carrying the cross on both sides of no-man's land in Belfast, Northern Ireland, marched across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland during December carrying a cross and speaking in public rallies.

Using the same approach, Tippit and several of his co-workers marched across Germany, staging a prayer and fast vigil on Christmas day at the Berlin Wall.

Tippit went to Germany hoping to bring the Jesus movement to that country, but said on his return that he found the Jesus movement was already there.

"It's (the movement) wide open over there," he said. "It's almost like it is in the U.S.A., with one major exception--the movement is almost wholly within the institutional church in Germany, while it is largely outside the institutional church in the U.S.A.," Tippit said.

Of his own efforts, Tippit said he felt he and his co-workers were able to spark new enthusiasm among German youth and to give them a new outlook on personal evangelism by encouraging them to witness boldly for Christ on the streets and in public places.

Tippit, who was recently arrested but cleared of charges of "disorderly conduct" after witnessing and passing out tracts in the Chicago night club district, said he encountered no opposition or difficulties in Germany, except from Communist youth who sought to heckle some of the rallies where he spoke.

In Frankfurt, Germany, several Marxist youth interrupted a rally where Tippit was speaking with shouts of "Power to the People" and demands for discussion. When the disturbance broke out, several youth on the stage went to their knees and began praying, and some of the Christian youth went to the Marxist group, fell on their knees and began praying right in the middle of the group.

Tippit said this really "blew their minds" and the Communists stopped the demonstration. Later, after the rally, the Christians held an open discussion with the Marxists.

One or two Communist youth were converted as a result, and one young man who previously was a Marxist followed the group 60 or 70 miles to the next city for another rally, Tippit said.

Tippit and his group marched from Munich to Kassel, on the border between East and West Germany, and then loaded their wooden cross on top of a used Volkswagen van they had bought, and drove across the autobahn to Berlin. The border guards "didn't know what to think of us," but they let them through, Tippit recalled.

In Berlin, the group held public rallies in the evenings at local churches, YMCA buildings, and public auditoriums, and in the day, they held a prayer and fast vigil at the Konrad Wilhelm Memorial Church near the bombed-out ruins of the old building.

On Christmas day, the prayer and fast vigil was moved to the Berlin Wall.

Tippit said crowds packed each of the rallies, and in one YMCA auditorium at Stuttgart, the rally was so crowded that kids were literally hanging from the rafters and windows, with crowds outside listening in 30-degree weather, he said.

Blessitt, interviewed in Concord, N.H., where he is beginning a three-month effort to urge candidates in the New Hampshire Primary to emphasize spiritual and moral issues in politics, said he encountered similar response in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England.

Like Tippit, Blessitt emphasized street witnessing among the people, and said that 300 young people in Belfast, Northern Ireland, had signed commitments to go out into the streets to witness for Christ.

People were more responsive there than any place he had ever been, Blessitt said. He said that unlike his previous visit to Belfast, he received not one threat. "I left with the feeling that there is revival beginning to take place in Ireland," he said.

Blessitt said he spoke in several big rallies and halls, and addressed nearly 60,000 people attending a "Festival of Light" at Hyde Park in London. In Manchester, England, 30,000 youth marched down the streets, he said.

The modly-dressed evangelist said he and his co-workers carried their cross more than 600 miles through small villages and towns in England, Scotland and Ireland. He said it really "shook" some of the people to see them carrying the cross and openly witnessing on the streets.

Blessitt said he plans to return to Belfast in April for Easter, and in May would go to France where he would carry the cross to Paris. He said he plans to spend most of 1972 carrying the cross throughout Europe.

Christmas day was temporarily marred for Tippit and his co-workers, after someone stole their cross while they were praying under a shelter near the Berlin Wall. It was raining, Tippit said, and they did not see who took the cross.

At first they were dismayed that anyone would steal their cross on Christmas day, but Tippit said they later rejoiced in the symbolism. "We felt the Lord had given us a cross to bear across Germany, and on the last day of our trip, it was like God had lifted the burden of that cross from us."

