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March 7, 1972

Leavenworth Prisoner Requests  
 Permission to Start SBC Church

LEAVENWORTH, Kan. (BP)--A prisoner in the federal penitentiary here has filed a petition in the U.S. District Court requesting permission to organize a Southern Baptist church or mission within prison walls.

Berl Estes McDonald, the prisoner, claimed in the petition that his "civil and constitutional rights" to his "personal freedom of religion" are being denied by the penitentiary's religious program which he described as "stereotyped and sterile and without any emotional or spiritual worth whatsoever."

McDonald sent a copy of the petition to the District of Columbia court to the Baptist Standard, weekly newspaper of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, with an accompanying letter saying that "we urgently need a revival here" at the prison.

"Let me assure you," he wrote, "this is a new mission field and we are in desperate need of God's word and God's blessing."

McDonald did not identify himself other than in the petition where he said he was serving a 10-year sentence and expected to be released "approximately November."

The petition was critical of the "interfaith" religious program at the penitentiary, charging that it consists only of "a printed prayer or two," some "sedentary church music, a printed reading from a dittoed program and a theological lecture," by the prison chaplain.

"The beliefs and practices of Baptists are not recognized in the program at Leavenworth although Christian Scientists, Mormons, Muslims, Moslems and other subordinate denominations are allowed to conduct special programs and services at various times," the petition said.

McDonald further claimed that Southern Baptist prisoners are confined to "lives of religious aridness and emotional and spiritual despair."

The petition requested permission for prisoners to "organize and maintain their own congregational church within the confines of the United States penitentiary."

It also requested that pastoral duties be performed by approved visiting Southern Baptist ministers, as well as by "a layman's committee and board of deacons composed of the prisoners who are members of the congregation."

It further requested authority to hold semi-annual revival services conducted by visiting evangelists.

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Bob Capra to Join SBC  
 Stewardship Commission

3/7/72

NASHVILLE (BP)--Robert G. Capra, vice president in charge of sales for Ambassador Church Finance, a church bond firm based here, has been named consultant in the endowment and capital giving service of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission here.

When Capra assumes the position March 13, it will mark the second time that he will have served on the national stewardship staff of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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He was assistant director of Cooperative Program promotion for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee from July 1959 to September 1960. He returned to the pastorate about the time the SBC Stewardship Commission was organized in 1960.

A native of St. Louis, Capra has been pastor of First Baptist Church, Lebanon, Tenn., and three churches in St. Louis--Ballwin Baptist Church, Fee Fee Baptist Church, and Salem Baptist Church.

In the new responsibility as consultant in endowment and capital giving, Capra will work primarily in the area of church and institutional fund raising through the Stewardship Commission's "Together We Build" program.

Last year, the commission assisted 25 churches in securing pledges for nearly \$5 million in building funds through the "Together We Build" program. According to Ben G. Gill, director of endowment and capital giving service for the commission, the commission was able to save these churches nearly \$2 million in interest they would have paid if they had borrowed the money rather than using the commission's fund raising service.

The commission conducts the campaigns on a cost-recovery basis, and Capra's salary and benefits will be paid through the cost-recovery factor of the service, according to James V. Lackey, executive director of the Stewardship Commission.

Lackey said the work in the fund raising area of the commission's endowment and capital giving service is expanding rapidly, necessitating the addition of another consultant. Two state conventions, Indiana and Illinois, are being assisted in state-wide fund raising efforts, and the commission is currently talking with two other conventions about such programs, Lackey said.

Both Lackey and Gill said Capra was uniquely qualified for the position, with previous experience on the SBC stewardship staff, in the pastorate, and in church building and fund raising.

A graduate of Shurtleff Baptist College in Alton, Ill., Capra earned the master of theology degree from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

During World War II, he served in the Army Medical Corps and was converted while stationed in England.

He is married to the former Grace Smallwood of St. Louis, who currently is employed as receptionist by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.



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