

July 21, 1972

## Baptist Minister Uses Riding Interest To Teach the Bible

By Adon Taft

TAMPA, Fla. (BP)--Using the old philosophy, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," a Southern Baptist minister here is seeking to reach church members and non-church members alike who'd rather ride horseback or motor bikes on Sunday than go to church.

Duane Alcorn, a former Texan, figures you can reach them all by providing a recreation ranch where both kinds of people can go horseback riding, motor biking, camping, AND attend worship services.

Alcorn and Tom Cunneen have formed a non-profit corporation to develop such a ministry on a two square-mile tract on Highway 301 southeast of Tampa.

They've had confidence in the idea for a long time, but they got proof positive when three months ago they began an experimental worship service on Sunday mornings at the riding stable which Cunneen owns, and where bikers and campers hang out with riders.

With only word-of-mouth promotion, attendance reached an average of 30 persons in six weeks, some of them coming from 30 miles away to attend.

The congregation includes a waitress who gets off work at 2:00 a.m. on Sunday morning and drives over from Clearwater, Fla., because she doesn't feel she can dress well enough to go to a regular church service.

It also includes a chain restaurant manager "who wouldn't go to a church, but he eats this up," according to Alcorn, who left his post as associate pastor of Tampa's First Baptist Church to undertake the experimental ministry.

Another worshipper is the ex-leader of a motorcycle gang who feels unaccepted and unwanted in regular churches. But when he cruises up on his bike here, he feels at home on the makeshift benches under a tree on the Cunneen ranch.

Both Cunneen and Alcorn feel they have been able to relate to the horse and bike riders because of their own backgrounds.

Through his business, Cunneen knows the area's popular rodeo riders, blacksmiths, veterinarians, and many of the Sunday-type riders.

Cunneen also knows a lot of the young "tough" guys who like bikes, drag racers, and such. He set national hot rod records himself in 1961 and 1966, and owned a drag strip and speed shop before turning to horses.

Alcorn learned what he knows about horses as a Texas farm boy. Cunneen rates him as a qualified rodeo rider. A graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Tex., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; Alcorn also likes to ride bikes.

Both have found that they can talk to the "tough" bikers, who treat them like one of their own because they let them be themselves.

Most of the cyclists are scrappy because they are defensive, Alcorn observed. They are trying to cover up a sense of failure as high school dropouts, or poor achievers, Alcorn added. But they have the same personal problems as everyone else and want to be loved for themselves just like everyone, he said.

In fact, it was a personal problem that brought Alcorn and Cunneen together. Mrs. Cunneen, Gail, three years ago tried to commit suicide by driving 130 miles an hour under the influ-

-more-

ence of sleeping pills.

Alcorn met her at a Tampa hospital when he was then pastor of University Baptist Church here. He prayed with her, and she committed her life to Jesus Christ.

Now Gail sees the life on the ranch, which once oppressed her, as "the greatest classroom in the world" for her five children. "They see the real order of life, the way God has created things," she said.

Because of his influence with Gail, Alcorn led Cunneen to Christ. But they soon found, as Gail said, "that the greatest test of our faith was to witness to the people we had known when we ran with the crowd."

Because of the concern they shared with Alcorn for those people, many who had nothing to do with a church and often were bitter toward the church, they decided to do something about it. Thus came the idea of the experimental ministry with the bikers, riders and campers.

"They were lost like I was," said Mrs. Cunneen. "But when you know how my life was changed, you realize that miracles can change their lives too."

Alcorn said he feels that the ministry, too, is changing today, and that the most effective ministry is in small groups studying the Bible, and person-to-person witnessing during the entire week.

So in leaving the formal pulpit for his work among the bikers, riders, and campers, "I feel I'm right where God wants me to be," he said.

-30-

#### Baptist Prof Calls for 1980 World Missions Conference

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)-- E. Luther Copeland, professor of missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here and newly elected president of the Association of Professors of Missions, has issued a call for a World Missions Conference to be held in 1980.

He proposed no meeting site, but suggested that the 1980 conference be in line with a famed Edinburgh Conference in 1910, and the World Congresses of the International Missionary Council.

Copeland spoke on the Christian mission in the last decades of the 20th century during a recent meeting of the Association of Professors of Missions when he was elected president of the organization.

A former missionary to Japan, Copeland suggested that major structures of mission will arise in the future which take seriously the "six continent" concept. He also predicted that the center of the resources for the Christian mission will shift from the Western World to somewhere in the Third World.

He proposed that the 1980 World Mission Conference be broadly representative of Christian missionary agencies. One purpose of such a conference, he said, would be to determine new structures of mission to the six continents.

Membership in the association which Copeland will lead as president for the next biennium includes professors of missions from the major theological schools in the United States and Canada.

-30-

#### McDonald Named Staff Consultant for NCCJ

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Erwin L. McDonald, retired editor of the Arkansas Baptist News magazine who is now religion editor of the Arkansas Democrat, has been named a staff consultant

-more-

for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc.

In announcing his appointment, NCCJ Regional Director William L. Pharr said that "McDonald has long been recognized for his leadership in civic and religious affairs in the state, and we are happy to have him join our staff in a volunteer, part-time connection."

McDonald will travel throughout the state in furtherance of the organization's programs, Pharr said.



**BAPTIST PRESS**

*460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

**RECEIVED**  
JUL 24 1972

**HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC**

LYNN MAY HO  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
127 9TH AVE. NO.  
NASHVILLE TN 37203