



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
400 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-5461
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

December 1, 1972

**Baptist Towers Fire
Prompts Panic, Heroism**

ATLANTA (BP)--The fire that swept through the Baptist Towers retirement home here took nine lives and left scores of elderly people unable to return to their apartments.

The tragedy that began on the seventh floor at 2:15 a.m., Nov. 30, prompted both panic and despair, and heroic acts and Christian faith.

More than 18 units of the Atlanta fire department answered the seven alarms that went out during near-freezing temperature and rain.

Ten of the firemen fighting the blaze had mothers who were residents of the 11-story building.

Actions of the firemen prompted high praise by the residents. One elderly lady said she was being helped down the stairs when her request for her coat sent a fireman back into her smoke-filled apartment to keep her from the cold winds outside.

The firemen, in response to praise from the residents, spoke of the courage and calmness of the residents.

There was a great deal of panic initially, however. Spokesmen said most of the nine who died in the inferno panicked and suffered smoke inhalation. Two were burned almost beyond recognition. Most of the bodies were found in the hallways.

More than 30 were injured, many of them from falls trying to escape. Most of those treated in Atlanta hospitals were victims of smoke rather than fire.

Despite some panic, others took the situation in calmly. One fireman crawling on his knees down a smoke-filled hall encountered an elderly man coolly walking toward the exit.

The tragedy was not without drama.

The 68-year-old widow of an Atlanta police captain, Mrs. Annie Maddox, whose apartment was on the fatal seventh floor, hung from her window for almost 40 minutes, at times by only one arm, before being lowered to the ground.

Firemen shouted encouragement to her, urging her to "hang on." She suffered severe burns along the arm inside her window. All the people living on both sides of here were killed.

A retired Southern Baptist home missionary, Mrs. Carey Bockleman, survived the blaze on her seventh-floor residence without injury. For 27 years, she had worked at the Dawson Baptist Goodwill Center in Atlanta.

The panic which occurred on the seventh floor was not apparent on other floors. Men and women driven from their rooms by smoke went back as soon as possible. They seemed to accept the whole episode stoically.

Some overcame physical difficulties with apparent ease. One older lady just out of the hospital after hip surgery calmly walked down six flights of stairs to safety.

Only the day before the fire, a retired schoolteacher had sent out invitations to all seventh floor residents inviting them to a Christmas party in her room. Most of those killed lived on the fatal floor.

-more-

DARGAN-CARVER LIBRARY
S. B. C. HISTORICAL COMMISSION
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Of the nine who perished five were members of Baptist churches.

One of those who died was a security guard answering a call for help on the seventh floor. He was trapped in one of the building's two elevators.

A number of firemen were among those injured. One suffered a heart attack. News reports indicated that firemen rescued at least 50 of the residents, not including those who escaped on their own.

Throughout the day following the early morning blaze, Red Cross workers, volunteers from churches and members of families of residents were busy providing comfort, food and information.

Those still unable to return to their apartments are being housed by friends and relatives, or in provisions made by the towers or sponsoring churches.

One Atlanta hotel offered to take care of all those displaced.

Baptist Towers opened its doors as a non-profit high-rise retirement center in April. The 11-story concrete and steel building has a capacity of 500 residents, and was built at a cost of \$4.5 million.

The project was started by seven area Southern Baptist churches, and was constructed with the aid of government funds. It was not an institution of the Georgia Baptist Convention, and no convention funds are involved in the project.

The seven churches, which supply trustees for the corporation that runs Baptist Towers, include First Baptist Church of College Park; Ben Hill and Beecher Hills Baptist Churches of Atlanta; and four churches in East Park, an Atlanta suburb--First Baptist Church of East Point, Dogwood Hills Baptist Church, Connally Drive Baptist Church, and Jefferson Avenue Baptist Church.

Gov. Jimmy Carter, himself a Baptist, visited the scene and called for an investigation of the state fire laws and for a study of upgrading the existing fire codes.

Baptist Towers conformed to all existing fire safety standards, officials noted.

Initial reports on the fire prompted some to confuse the home with the Peachtree on Peachtree Inn, a home for the aging in downtown Atlanta owned by the Georgia Baptist Convention. Baptist Towers, which has no convention ties, is located in southwest Atlanta near the suburb of East Point.

-30-

Third Evangelist Dies From Burns in Plane Crash

12/1/72

NASHVILLE (BP)--Ray Sadler of Total Evangelistic Concepts, an independent Southern Baptist evangelistic team based here, died in an Army hospital from burns in a firey plane crash that earlier claimed the lives of two fellow Baptist evangelists.

Sadler, who suffered burns on 90 per cent of his body, amazed hospital officials by walking away from the scene of the crash.

Burned almost beyond recognition when the Beechcraft Bonanza single-engine plane crashed several miles south of the Nashville airport were Henry Bruce French, an associate evangelist and pilot for 20 years; and Barton Barrett, music director for the team.

Sadler died at the burn treatment center of Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio three days after the crash.

Sadler died at the burn treatment center of Brook Army Medical Center in San Antonio three days after the crash.

-more-

Officials of the Federal Aviation Agency were still investigating cause of the mishap. It was rainy and foggy when the small private plane disappeared from the radar screen after it had been cleared for an instrument approach landing.

A witness on the scene of the crash said he saw Sadler running from the plane, screaming for help. Most of his clothes had been burned from his body, and the ones still remaining were smoking and smouldering.

Sadler had been returning from a bus evangelism clinic at Briarlake Baptist Church in Atlanta. He had been the closing speaker at the clinic, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, and was noted nationally in the SBC as an expert on bus evangelism.

In addition to directing Total Evangelistic Concepts, Inc., Sadler was also involved with his brother, Joe Sadler, in operation of the American Church Bus Co., which refinished old school buses for sale to churches; and the Church Bus Evangelism Supply Co., which produced and supplied "gimmicks" for the bus ministries of churches.

A native of Nashville, Sadler had been associate pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church of Nashville before resigning to go into full-time evangelism earlier this year. He was a graduate of Belmont College here, and former pastor of churches in Nashville and Clarksville, Tenn.

French formerly was pastor of SBC churches in Pensacola, Fla., and Indiana; and Barrett is a former evangelist from Galena Park, Tex.

-30-

NOTE TO EDITOR: This story updates the BP report carried 11-28-72

Eual Lawson Retires
From Missions Staff

12/2/72

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board meeting here honored Eual F. Lawson, associate director in the board's Division of Evangelism, on his retirement after 25 years of mission-related work and a 43-year ministry.

Executive Secretary Arthur B. Rutledge, in presenting a plaque and resolution of appreciation, praised the enthusiasm and compassion for people Lawson has displayed in his commitment to evangelism.

A native of Oklahoma, Lawson received academic training for a business career and later attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He was pastor of churches in Oklahoma and New Mexico before becoming the first state secretary of evangelism for the Baptist Convention of New Mexico.

In 1955 he joined the SBC Home Mission Board evangelism staff as director of evangelism on the associational level. He participated in numerous evangelistic crusades in Panama, Jamaica, Brazil, South America, New Zealand and throughout the United States.

Lawson said he plans to "retire" in Dallas, but contends that "retire" is not the correct word. He says his new status will only add more freedom to his life's work. He said he intends to continue to participate in revivals, lay witness schools, work in pioneer areas, and foreign crusades, as well as raise some cattle and keep up his golfing and jogging.

-30-



BAPTIST PRESS

*460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

RECEIVED
DEC 4 1972
HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SEC

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

HO