



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
460 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

March 1, 1973

Fire at Baptist Towers
Aired at Senate Hearing

WASHINGTON (BP)--A U. S. Senate subcommittee, in a two day hearing here, focused on the fatal fire at Baptist Towers in Atlanta in which 10 persons died last November, in an effort to investigate safety standards in high rise buildings, especially those for the elderly.

Sen. Harrison A. Williams (D., N.J.), chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, conducted the hearings. In his opening statement, Williams asked:

Does housing for the elderly demand a special system of fire safety?

Do federal housing programs need to be restructured to guarantee better safety? Do we need stronger and stricter codes?

Is it a cost problem when a brand new building like Baptist Towers, though built 100 per cent according to code, is hit by a multiple death fire?

"Clearly something is wrong," Sen. Williams said. "I cannot believe that with our advanced know-how, we cannot build an apartment building that will prevent multiple-death fires.

"Tragedy was not avoided in Atlanta, and this subcommittee wants to know why," he declared.

George Snow, manager of Baptist Towers, and two tenants were present as witnesses.

Mrs. Flora Webb told the committee how a fireman's "snorkel" lifted her from a seventh story window to safety.

Paul Bennett, who led his wife through dense smoke with her head hidden under his arm, told the committee that when he moved in to Baptist Towers, he walked all the stairwells from the top of the 11-story structure to the bottom to see if he could escape in case of fire.

The hearings focused on why the ten persons died in the Baptist Towers fire on Nov. 30, 1972

A spokesman for the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) cited several factors. A. Elwood Willey, a specialist in the fire record department of NFPA, pointed out there were a combination of factors involved in the ignition of combustible contents in the room where the fire originated, and the resulting exposure to the adjacent corridor.

In this case, Willey said, occupants in 29 other apartment units on the fire floor were exposed to smoke, toxic gases and heat. Most of the deaths were on the fatal seventh floor.

The combination of factors responsible for this exposure, Willey said, included: "A delayed alarm; that the door to the apartment of origin (of the fire) was left open; the design of the ventilation system; the use of corridor carpeting with fire hazard characteristics beyond what is considered acceptable for that location; and the fact that the apartment of origin was on the windward side of the building." In his testimony, Willey elaborated on each reason.

A study by the fire protection association indicates that most of the factors significant to the Baptist Towers fire are all too common in other residential losses, Wiley testified.

The essential lesson shown in the Baptist Towers fire, he continued, is that "an improved life safety environment" must be created for all residential occupancies, whether they house elderly persons, or whether they are high-rise structures.

He added that a study of the Baptist Towers situation indicates that evacuation alarm criteria "may not be adequate" for persons with special hearing needs. A significant number of the occupants either did not hear of did not recognize the alarm, indicating that the signal was either not loud enough or not familiar to the occupant, or both.

Wiley suggested that the committee consider several proposals: fire safety education in housing for the elderly, door closers on apartment entry doors, early warning detectors, the elimination of the use of corridors as "supply plenums" to reduce the smoke and toxic gases exposure to other apartments, subdividing floors with "smoke stop partitions" and isolation of the elevator lobby.

Wiley agreed with other witnesses on the need for automatic sprinklers. "We have yet to record a multiple loss of life in a building protected by automatic sprinklers," he said.

The chairman of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Richard E. Bland, emphasized the need to require "complete automatic sprinkler systems... (as) the available technical solution toward control of fire in housing for the elderly, regardless of the types of care or the housing unit."

Though the automatic sprinkler system is costly, Bland said he personally believed that some of the fire retardance requirements of building construction could be set aside if automatic suppression and control systems are required.

The builder of Baptist Towers, Thomas A. Butler, Sr. of Abco Builders, Inc., listed a number of safety items that could have been included which are not presently required by the national or local codes. The cost of these items, including the various stages for sprinklers, would have been over \$700,000. The cost of the 11-story building with a capacity for 500 residents was \$4.5 million.

The manager of Baptist Towers, George Snow, in an interview with Baptist Press, said that a number of changes had been made since the fire. These include expanding the intercom to all floors in hallways, and an emergency light system in all apartments that is connected to a central panel available to guards and office personnel.

Baptist Towers opened its doors as a non-profit retirement center last April. The project was started by seven churches which supply trustees for the corporation which manages it. These churches are: First Baptist Church of College Park, Ben Hill and Beecher Hills Baptist Churches of Atlanta, First Baptist Church of East Point, Dogwood Hills Baptist Church, Connally Drive Baptist Church, and Jefferson Avenue Baptist Church.

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Baptists Help Produce New
TV Series, Two Network Shows

3/1/73

FORT WORTH (BP)--The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission here announced plans for a new television series designed to show spiritual dimensions of Christian athletes, plus two network telecasts on the faith of a Baptist astronaut and an 80-year-old woman who suffered persecution in Nazi concentration camps.

Filming is to begin in March on the new television series, "The Athletes" produced by the Radio-TV Commission in cooperation with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

On March 18, the National Broadcasting Co. (NBC-TV) will broadcast an hour-long conversation between Apollo 15 astronaut James B. Irwin, Harvard University professor of archaeology G. Ernest Wright, and NBC London correspondent Jack Paxton. The program will be carried from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. EST, Sunday, March 18.

The following Sunday, March 25, the American Broadcasting Co. (ABC-TV) will present "A Tramp for the Lord" featuring the life story of Miss Corrie ten Boom, in conversation with ABC Newsman George Watson. The program will be carried on the ABC "Directions" series from 1:00 to 1:30 p.m., EST.

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Both the network programs were produced by the networks in cooperation with the SBC Radio-TV Commission here.

Chicago Cubs infielder Don Kessinger will be the first professional athlete to be featured in "The Athletes," a series of 13 films to be produced yearly in cooperation with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The series will be filmed, in color, in 15 minute segments, for release early in 1974.

Other athletes who have agreed to participate in the series include Brooks Robinson of the Baltimore Orioles; Olympic skater Janet Lynn of Rockford, Ill.; Winston Hill of the New York Jets; and Tim Foley of the Miami Dolphins.

"The concept of the series is to get away from cliches, to show the athlete as a rounded individual, not just a one-dimensional person," said John Stevens, who is producing the series for the Radio-TV Commission.

"Most sports-minded Americans see only the athlete in action," he continued. "We plan to film each subject at home with his family, show his hobbies and recreational activities, and listen to him discuss his spiritual involvement. That way the public can view him as a multi-dimensional personality."

Stevens said the series would be particularly useful to television stations for use just before a televised game, during half-time, or immediately following major sports events.

In addition, 10 prints of each segment will be available through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes organization for use in the association's 1,700 "Huddle" groups across the country. The groups are composed of athletes or persons interested in athletics.

Some of the other athletes scheduled for filming in the first 13 segments include Mel Kenyon, the auto racer who lost a hand in a driving accident but continues to compete; Jeff Mullins of San Francisco's Golden State Warriors basketball team; Paul Anderson, Olympic gold medalist often called the world's strongest man; Jake Gaither, head coach for the Florida A&M football team; John Wooden, head coach for UCLA's basketball team; and Brian Sternberg who held the world's record for the pole vault before he was paralyzed in a trampoline mishap.

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Peace to Bring Chaplaincy
Reduction in Armed Forces

3/1/73

ATLANTA (BP)--With the wind down of the Vietnam war, a reduction of chaplains serving in the armed forces is being felt, Southern Baptist Director of Chaplaincy James W. Kelly, said here.

"The reduction started some years ago and is now being more keenly felt by some denominations than others--including Southern Baptists. The SBC is experiencing a lull in the recruitment of chaplains for active duty, and this is likely to continue for a few years," he said.

Kelly, formerly Navy Chief of Chaplains, learned recently in a Washington briefing that the Navy expects to reduce their chaplaincy force by as much as 150 from the 950 Navy chaplains now serving. The Air Force, now with about 1,040 chaplains will decrease nearly 100. The Army expects to maintain its corps of chaplains at 1,450.

While all branches of the military will be taking in new chaplains this year, Kelly said he thinks Chaplains will be recruited mainly from denominations which are under quota.

He said Southern Baptists exceeded their quota some years ago when qualified pastors volunteered for the chaplaincy when the need was great and other denominations were not providing their quota of chaplains.

At present time 738 Southern Baptist chaplains are serving in the reserve, National Guard, and Civil Air Patrol chaplain corps. There are 539 Southern Baptist chaplains serving on active duty.

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