



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

---FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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

May 9, 1973

First in a Series

Wounded Knee Incident
Leaves Impact on Missions

By Everett Hullum and Sandy Simmons

WOUNDED KNEE, S.D. (BP)--The incident at Wounded Knee, where American Indian Movement (AIM) militants occupied the tiny village here for almost three months, is over, but its impact will not be forgotten soon.

The shock waves created by the incident, which left two Indians dead and forced the evacuation of many Indian villagers, have reverberated throughout other Indian reservations, shaking up the entire national scene.

The effect of Wounded Knee on Southern Baptist ministries on Indian reservations across the nation is described in depth treatment in the June issue of Home Missions magazine. Magazine staffers interviewed nearly 50 Southern Baptist missionaries who work with Indians in compiling the treatment.

During the grim days of the Indian seige in South Dakota, Indians in Santa Fe, N.M., picketed the Southern Baptist-sponsored Indian Hall, presenting missionary Ken Prickett with a petition requesting a name change for the center.

The Indian Hall controversy, involving only a small number of Indians, passed without violence and in fact became an opportunity for Southern Baptists to begin dialogue with members of the militant AIM group.

Indian Hall has significance to Baptists because it represents the first direct attack on SBC Indian-language missions and the second time in a month that SBC missionary work has been confronted or curtailed by Indians.

The first instance was Wounded Knee itself, where missionary Harold Heiney serves. Both Heiney and Prickett are white.

Although Wounded Knee and Indian Hall are worlds apart in consequences and import, both symbolize the growing Indian disenchantment with "non-Indian" methods, techniques and ways, and reflect a swelling dissatisfaction with a status quo which condemns Indians to a life of second-class citizenship and third-class destiny.

Both signal the end of stoic, patient acceptance of maltreatment and neglect.

"Our people are tired of being considered second-rate," says Allen Elston, Southern Baptists' 13-year missionary to Warm Springs Reservation, Ore. "They are people of great dignity and worth, and they want to be treated that way."

Adds missionary Tony Brewington, a native Lumbee Indian who works with his own and three other tribes in North Carolina: "Our folks sympathize with the AIM ideals, but they do not advocate its methods."

Other SBC missionaries across the United States expressed basically the same opinions.

The majority of Indians today, report the missionaries, do not support the violent confrontations and militant tactics of groups like AIM--but they do favor AIM's objective of increased self-determination and greater control by Indians of their own destinies--from education to religion.

"Mostly the attitude of our people," says Dolton Haggan, missionary on Mississippi's Choctaw reservation, "is they favor the goals of AIM--well, I wouldn't say all of them, but most of them. They're very conscious of their Indian background and there is a strong element of self-determination in what they do. They are very much in favor of greater recognition of their heritage and their right to control their own lives. But they want to get what they get through their own work."

Throughout the nation, SBC missionaries also report their work is mostly unaffected by Wounded Knee--or the movement it symbolizes--at least for now.

But in more than one place missionaries sense a tenseness. "Gallup, (N.M.) is ripe for something like Wounded Knee," says Jack Comer, missionary to the Navajo. "It'll probably be next on the list."

James Nelson, New Mexico director of missions and a long-time observer of Indian work, notes the tension but doesn't blame it all on Wounded Knee.

"It's a spontaneous thing," he says, "a feeling that has been boiling underneath and is now beginning to boil over in many places."

"I've been surprised we've had no trouble," says Allison Holman, missionary to Arizona's Papago Indians. "If anything, conditions here are worse than at Wounded Knee."

Indian living and working conditions across the nation are substandard, the missionaries agree. They are, in fact, much below those of U.S. citizens as a whole.

Indian poverty rates are high, alcoholism is a universal problem of epidemic proportions, and unemployment (15 to 70 per cent) soars above the national averages.

Bruce Conrad, who for 20 years has been involved in Indian student work, first in Oklahoma and now at Intermountain Indian School in Brigham City, Utah, believes Indians--especially youth--are in a transitional period.

In recent months he has noted a withdrawal trend among students; they are attempting to return to "old ways," which has included rejecting the Christian (Anglo) church.

"I talked to some AIM students," Conrad says, "and they felt like the churches have taken advantage of the Indians in the past."

From the beginning it was apparent that the seige at Wounded Knee was not to be taken lightly. Indian leaders of the American Indian Movement in early March took charge of the trading post, held hostages in the Catholic church, and demanded the removal of Tribal Council President Dick Wilson, who was charged with corruption.

Christian missions with the Ogala Sioux, who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation where Wounded Knee is located, were caught in the crossfire between AIM leaders and Indians who followed Wilson.

The future of churches on the reservation is still questionable.

Wounded Knee, a sparsely settled community with a museum and trading post, is the site of an 1890 massacre in which more than 300 Indian men, women and children were killed by the U.S. Cavalry. Because it was the final, bloody battle of America's Indian wars, AIM chose Wounded Knee as a symbolic site of their confrontation with federal authorities.

But while AIM goals threatened the future of reservation churches, doubt should be tempered with the understanding the AIM is largely concerned with removal of long-established and heavily institutionalized Catholic and Episcopalian churches, says SBC missionary A.L. Davis of nearby Rapid City, S. D.

Davis began the first Baptist work on the reservation in 1966. When Baptists started, 50 per cent of the 11,000 people were Catholic and 40 per cent Episcopalian.

Since then, other churches have begun. They include Wesleyan Methodist, Mormon, Pentecostal and two Indian originated churches, the Body of Christ Church and the Native American Church.

All Christian groups who work with Indians have, however, felt the birth-pangs of Indian pride and the swirling uncertainty of reservation politics.

"Modern day Christian Indian work attempts to keep a low white profile and to blanket the white European identity of Christianity," says Frank Sharp, a spokesman for American Baptists.

Baptists, of all denominations, are beginning "to allow Indians to run their own churches and white administrators for Indian work are now being replaced by Indian ones," Sharp says.

Southern Baptists' Davis says the hope for smaller churches remaining on the reservation probably rests on friendships developed with Indian people.

During one three-week period, only one service was held at Sharp's Corner, S.D., because Wounded Knee roadblocks made a round-about trip of 80 miles necessary, and sun-down curfews kept drivers off roads after dark.

Plans for summer mission work have been changed, too, Heiney adds. One church committed to bringing summer workers for three Vacation Bible Schools has cancelled out. A second, Glenwood Baptist of Knoxville, Tenn., still hopes to hold the Vacation Bible Schools some time in summer.

In Okmulgee, Okla., Frank Belvin reports unease and split loyalty among his people.

"Some real Christian people (Indians) are so undecided they just don't know what to do," says Belvin. "Some people have thought maybe this is the way to get some needed things done. But I think I would be safe in saying that the majority of Indians around here say that Wounded Knee isn't the way to solve problems."

Belvin feels part of the answer is employment.

"I think the only thing that will ever bring men to reconcile with one another is a regenerated heart," he says, "but when a person can have a good living and feel responsible, this will do a lot toward alleviating problems."

"When people go hungry, when people go ragged, when people have no home in which to live," continues Belvin, "it makes things very difficult. There is no sure cure for all this, but I do know that full employment would settle a lot of unrest."

Meanwhile, Southern Baptists have discovered part of their role may be to reconcile the rift between Indian and Indian, says Heiney, who remained at the Pine Ridge Reservation through out the Wounded Knee incident.

Bringing off that reconciliation between Indian and Indian will be no easy task.

The crux of the problem may have been expressed by William O'Connell of the Rapid City Catholic Diocese. "The ordinary citizens in the local community are split down the middle regarding AIM," he says. "Most reject its violence; all understand what they are trying to do. AIM's words speak to the persecuted heart of the American Indian: the recognition of his dignity, rights and equal justice."

"We (Anglos) must try to understand what has happened to American Indians, who were placed on reservations, made wards of the state, for so long deprived of full citizenship," concludes O'Connell.

A Pueblo Indian Council leader who supports the stand of AIM put it even stronger. He charged that the government has treated the Indian as "subjects, not as people...as robots devoid of free will." And he blasted the Christian church for "calling our native religion 'pagan' and belittling our sacred ways."

To work effectively with the Indians, Baptists must come to a new understanding of the intense feelings Indians have after centuries of oppression and mistreatment. Many Southern Baptist missionaries have already found that understanding.

I'm sort of anti-white now myself," says Anglo Barbara Meffort at Lame Deer, Mont., a missionary to the Northern Cheyenne. "I agree with the Indians."

"I feel very much like an Indian," adds John Mouser, who's been working with Indians for 17 years. "I've got an Indian heart. I really love the people."

-30-

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the first of a two-part series on the effect of the Wounded Knee incident on SBC home missions work. Second in the series, dealing with changes in SBC missions work that may come because of the incident, will be mailed tomorrow, May 10.

Baptists Support Federal
Family Planning Programs

5/9/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--James A. Langley, executive secretary of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention here, urged Congress to enlarge the federal commitment to family planning services.

Langley testified before the subcommittee on Health of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Sen. Alan Cranston (D., Calif.) is chairman of the committee which is considering a bill to increase funds for research and several others areas related to birth control and family planning services.

Citing resolutions adopted by both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Langley sought in his testimony to communicate the stance of the 12 million and two million member conventions' statements on the issues involved.

The resolutions, Langley said, pointed out the problems of overpopulation, malnutrition and starvation in many parts of the world and the right of parents to determine the size of their families. Both resolutions support the need for birth control methods and information for parents who desire these.

The resolution on family planning was adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1967. The statement by the Baptist General Convention of Texas was approved in 1968.

"There is no thought or desire to impose by force or government action our convictions in these matters," Langley testified. "At the same time each married couple desiring information concerning family planning ought to be able to obtain it."

Langley said that the availability and use of safe and effective means of birth control "would go far toward eliminating the profoundly disturbing questions and problems relating to abortion in many instances."

The view he represented on birth control and family planning, Langley said, grew out of Baptists' understanding of the nature of man. In elaborating on this he said that "every child has the right to be wanted, and cared for, for his or her own sake..."

"Is it rational, to say nothing of compassionate, not to exert the most determined effort through research to provide effective means of determining whether a child shall be born with hope for something of the fuller life, and safe means of contraception in order that the mother's life may also be safeguarded?" Langley asked.

Upon questioning by Cranston, Langley said he felt the "multiplied millions" spent by the government in foreign aid have been "undercut" because the United States did not do more in international programs for family planning, when requests for help come from the host countries.

-more-

Cranston's bill stresses that participation in family planning services shall be voluntary. The bill also would prohibit any funds appropriated to be used in programs "where abortion is a method of family planning."

Under the bill, nonprofit groups qualify for funds to "plan and develop comprehensive programs of family planning services."

Langley told the committee that various agencies of the denomination have long been involved in sponsoring family planning clinics. However, these efforts by private groups are not adequate alone, he said.

"This is one of those tasks which in our complex world requires strong government leadership in research and services in family planning, and support of the private sector."

Testifying on the same panel with the Baptist leader was Bishop James Ault, a United Methodist bishop from Philadelphia, speaking for the Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church.

Langley said he was testifying at the request of Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the SBC Christian Life Commission, and James Dunn, the Texas Christian Life Commission executive.