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October 12, 1973

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Church Elects Deaconesses;
Students Urge Female Rights

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By the Baptist Press

The subject of women serving as deaconesses in Southern Baptist churches has arisen on two fronts--Memphis, Tenn., where Prescott Memorial Church elected two women, and in Louisville, Ky., where seminary students affirmed "the right of the female to serve in the position of deacon in our Southern Baptist churches."

Mrs. Annette Bickers, 35, of Memphis, and Mrs. Evelyn Estelle, 39, of Cordova, Tenn., elected in a secret ballot along with four men from a roster of 18 names, were scheduled for ordination by the Memphis church.

In Louisville, a resolution by the student senate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary not only affirmed the right of the female to serve as a deacon but also "to interpret and to answer the call to the Christian ministry, regardless of what form that ministry may take."

The resolution also made the "request that our local churches and their memberships, as well as the agencies and departments of our Southern Baptist Convention, support these affirmations by a more conscientious effort to consider women for all areas of Christian service and ministry."

While not numerous in terms of more than 34,500 SBC churches, ordination of women to serve as deacons or deaconesses is not a novelty in the Southern Baptist Convention.

No exact statistics are available, but a survey by The Deacon, quarterly publication of the SBC Sunday School Board, reveals some scattered Southern Baptist churches in Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, New York State, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Washington, D. C., and Tennessee have ordained women as deaconesses.

At least one other church in Tennessee, First Baptist Church, Oak Ridge, has a woman, the widow of a former pastor, on the deacon board.

John Trantham, pastor of the Memphis church, said he felt the church took the stance on deaconesses because of historical and biblical precedent and "because of the equality of men and women in Christ."

The Memphis church had no written constitution until a year ago in July when a two-year committee study resulted in the adoption of the present constitution which specifies that women may be elected as deacons. It passed unanimously after a reading before the church.

Mrs. Estelle, a school teacher, was nominated last year to serve as a deacon but defeated by one vote in a run-off election.

Mrs. Bickers and her husband, William Jesse Bickers, formerly served as Southern Baptist missionaries to Paraguay.

Oldham Foundation Gives
\$1 Million to Churches

181 AB

ATLANTA (BP)--The Oldham Little Church Foundation of Houston has given more than \$1 million through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to 394 small mission churches.

The financial bequest, largest single gift to churches through the mission agency, involves the transfer of business property, located near downtown Houston, to the Home Mission Board.

"This will strengthen our efforts in church extension for some years to come, for it will enable us to utilize the earnings from this property for continuing assistance to small churches," said Home Mission Board executive, Arthur B. Rutledge, in accepting the gift on behalf of the churches.

The Oldham Foundation, established in 1949 by Houston dairyman Morris C. Oldham and continued by his widow in 1955, concentrates its assistance to small evangelical Protestant churches.

Oldham, a Southern Baptist, believed that "more souls were saved through the efforts of small churches than by any other means."

The funds assist churches in Puerto Rico and 37 states, more than a third of them in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Kansas.

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Board Sets \$1 Million
Cooperative Program Goal

115 NO

10/12/73

LUTHERVILLE, Md. (BP)--The state mission board of the Baptist Convention of Maryland has approved the first \$1 million dollar Cooperative Program unified budget goal in its 136-year history.

The board gave initial approval to a gross 1974 budget of \$1.37 million, with \$1,005,764 anticipated Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches in Maryland. Final approval must come at the Maryland convention's annual meeting, Nov. 12-14, in Baltimore.

Maryland Baptists have earmarked 60 per cent of the Cooperative Program receipts for use in the state and 40 per cent for Southern Baptist Convention causes. Any receipts above the goal will also be divided 60-40.

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Baptist Seminarian Places
18th in Czech Marathon

102 NO

10/12/73

FORT WORTH (BP)--Don Kennedy, a 25-year-old distance runner and student attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here, placed 18th in a field of 160 runners competing in the recent International Peace Marathon in Kosice, Czechoslovakia.

Kennedy, a native of Fayetteville, N. C., preparing for a vocation in campus ministries, ran the rugged 26-mile, 385-yard course in 2 hours, 27 minutes and 12.8 seconds.

Two other American runners placed 11th and 29th in the race to give the United States a fourth-place finish, behind the U.S.S.R., East Germany and Sweden.

Chosen by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) to represent the U.S.A. in the marathon, Kennedy said he was somewhat disappointed by his time. In the national AAU championship marathon in California, earlier this year, he was clocked at 2 hours, 19 minutes and 58 seconds for the same distance, Kennedy said.

"The heat hurt me just as it did the others," he said of the Kosice race. Times were slower than they should have been because of 80-degree heat, he added. Vladimir Mojsejev, the Soviet runner and winner, had a time of 2 hours, 19 minutes and 1.2 seconds.

Kennedy said he left behind or "lost" his Bible and a book on witnessing before leaving Communist Czechoslovakia.

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Despite Scandal

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10/12/73

Baptist Leaders Predict
Bright Future in Government

By the Baptist Press

A group of prominent Southern Baptist leaders urged a greater awareness and involvement on the part of Christians in the wake of what they called "sorrowful" and "disgraceful" developments surrounding the resignation of former Vice President Spiro Agnew and his plea of nolo contendere (no contest) to charges of income tax evasion.

Responding to Baptist Press interviews were Owen Cooper, president of the Southern Baptist Convention; Brooks Hays, former Arkansas congressman and former SBC president; Porter Routh, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee; Roy D. Gresham and James A. Langley, respective top executives of Baptist conventions in Maryland and the District of Columbia; Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the SBC Christian Life Commission; and James E. Wood Jr., director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Expressing "surprise and regret" at the revelation of Agnew's guilt and his resignation from the nation's second highest political post, Cooper said he believes "the nation will come out stronger for this (the Watergate and Agnew situations), because I believe people will come out stronger in their selection of candidates for the future and will be more careful in their balloting."

The Southern Baptist layman, a retired industrialist from Yazoo City, Miss., reapplied a statement he made on Watergate in the SBC president's address in June in Portland, Ore.

"There is a lesson for us in Watergate--and now in the situation with Mr. Agnew," he explained.

The Portland speech said, "It (Watergate) shows us that wrongdoing is no respecter of persons, that exalted position offers no immunity for crime, that misuse of money is the root of all kinds of evil and that the secular and materialistic standards of a secular society operate on the basis that every man has his price, that there is no wrong if you're not caught and that Christian ethics and virtue died as our scientific and technological age was born.

"If from Watergate and Mr. Agnew's situation we learn there are moral standards, Christian ethics, right and wrong and that we need to return to the simple virtues of our founding fathers--then these developments may have been worth the price," Cooper told Baptist Press, the SBC news service.

Cooper called for a return to the "Judao-Christian moral values as reflected in the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments and in the teachings of Jesus Christ"--a return to "using love and compassion as our guide of conduct in relation with our fellow man."

Routh and other Southern Baptists leaders echoed Cooper's dismay with the widely-publicized reports of political corruption in the United States. Routh and Hays expressed concern that political scandals might cause American young people to lose faith or interest in the nation's form of government.

"Christian young people should look to political life as a challenging vocation for meaningful service to God and man," Routh stressed. "Apprehension increases when the highest officials of our nation either admit guilt or their top advisors are under suspicion

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for wrongdoing.

"We must balance this apprehension with a faith that multiplied thousands of government workers are committed to the public good and are guided by genuine ethical concerns," Routh said.

Hays, 75, said, "We can take heart. Young people need not view politics as an ignoble vocation. Their religious and moral principles are needed, and their dedication to the unfinished tasks will give us, their elders, greater hope." Hays served as SBC president in 1958-59.

Continuing the note of positivism on the future of American politics, Wood, director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in the nation's capital, said the "telling evidence of criminal lawlessness in high places soberly challenges all of us to a recommitment to integrity in government, without which no government can be maintained or can merit public trust."

He continued, "Let us hope and pray that out of this crisis may come a real turning point in American public life."

A recent "Statement of Concern" issued by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs during its meeting in Washington, D. C., called for an "affirmation of trust in the basic principles of the American system of democracy" and said, "Believing that separation of church and state does not mean separation of religion from government or politics, nor should it imply the divorce of religion's basic moral and ethical principles from the conduct of public affairs, we voice our concern over some recent developments in public life and reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental principles of democracy."

The committee's statement was released about a week prior to the former vice president's day in court and his resignation.

The executive secretaries of two neighboring Baptist conventions differed slightly in their reaction to Agnew's resignation and his admission of guilt before Federal District Court Judge Walter E. Hoffman in Washington.

Langley of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention said that despite Agnew's "recent vehement denial to guilt and impending resignation, I was not greatly surprised either by his resignation nor his admission of income tax evasion.

"Political analysts of the first rank for weeks indicated he would very probably resign, and one could reasonably assume that the Justice Department in charges affecting the second highest official in the land had the evidence to prove its charges."

Gresham of the Baptist Convention of Maryland, in Agnew's home state, said he had felt personally that Agnew "was not guilty to the extent, of course, that it was revealed" and called the news of Agnew's guilt "disappointing."

The Maryland Baptist leader said he visited Agnew in the former vice president's office when the Good News for Modern Man translation of the New Testament came out. "I gave him (Agnew) a copy of the book and was able on different occasions to see him and chat with him. I was tremendously impressed with Agnew. . . and I had personally been an Agnew supporter," Gresham added.

Both state convention heads expressed their sadness and sympathy for Agnew and his family and for the nation.

Langley said, "I feel chagrined, both personally and for the nation. Under the circumstances I'm convinced that resignation was the only right course for him to take."

The D. C. Baptist leader emphasized that recent developments of political corruption in the nation's government, and now the conviction and resignation of the nation's second highest elected official, is taking its toll on America's image and position in the rest of the world.

Gresham reiterated the Joint Committee's Statement of Concern, saying, the implication of the Agnew scandal for Southern Baptists "is to say to us as Christian people that we ought to become involved in politics, that we ought to have candidates who are Christian, that we ought to have our people in civic and community organizations.

". . . If that's where the action is, that's where the needs are."

Addressing himself to what he called a "bad moral climate" in Maryland politics, Gresham said, "This whole moral climate has served a real blow to Maryland and to all Christians in Maryland. . . It creates a real bad moral climate for us to work in and overcome."

Consensus among the Southern Baptist leaders asked to respond to Agnew's resignation, his conviction and other reports of current political scandal was that Christians shouldn't become cynical about government, nor should they be self-righteous or "dogmatically judgmental."

Foy Valentine of the Christian Life Commission said he found "no comfort at all in Mr. Agnew's pitiful predicament." Valentine said he joined Christians across the land in praying for Agnew, his family and the nation--"all touched with the feeling of moral infirmities of historic proportions."

In a recent letter from Valentine and Cecil E. Sherman, chairman of the Christian Life Commission, more than 500 U.S. congressmen were called on to encourage the Senate Select Committee to "persevere with its bipartisan investigation" into the Watergate affair, "to the end that no coverup of lawlessness will be tolerated and all the lawbreakers may be brought to justice."

The commission further urged the congressmen to give their support to legislation "aimed at correcting abuses in the present political process, including your careful consideration of a plan for the public financing of political campaigns."

The letter, dated October 8, 1973, was in response to a direction from the commission, meeting in Nashville in September.

Even before the Agnew resignation, the commission had scheduled, on Oct. 30, a breakfast for Baptist congressmen in the nation's capital to discuss the "current crisis in government and the shocking distrust of the political process now being expressed by many citizens, and reaffirm our confidence in the political process."

Cooper, Valentine and Sherman are among Baptist leaders scheduled to meet with an expected 50 legislators who are Baptists.

Valentine said Americans should now "bring forth fruits demonstrating that we have changed our own minds about our own sins and to begin rebuilding with a new commitment to Jesus Christ our Lord.

"There is no other way for us to achieve a recovery of morality for ourselves, for our churches and for our country," Valentine said.