

December 14, 1973

WMU Program

Baptist Women Meet Neighbors
Through 'Coffee-Dialogues'

By Dale Helmbold
For Baptist Press

With a coffee cup in one hand and a Bible in the other, women of various backgrounds and faiths across the nation are gathering in their local neighborhoods to discuss how the Bible can help them cope with daily living.

The leader in one of these informal, neighborhood groups gives a quick summary of a passage from the Bible to launch discussion.

A "coffee-dialogue" is in progress.

Coffee-dialogues, a growing program of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), are designed to help women get in spiritual touch with their neighbors outside the church.

The idea is for a woman, with the support of her church's Baptist Women organization, to foster a weekly neighborhood Bible discussion. Home-based groups of women drink coffee and talk about Jesus Christ and religion in a relaxed atmosphere.

Although results are difficult to interpret in this highly individual plan, reports filtering in indicate that Baptist women are delighted with a method for meeting neighbors on a deeper level than purely social.

Mrs. Herman Sehested, a member of University Baptist Church in Fort Worth, saw a definite need for something to bring her neighbors together. The first woman she talked with was an Episcopalian from a northern state who was enthusiastic about the idea for coffee-dialogues. The woman told other neighbors and the neighborhood's program was underway.

A Floridian, Mrs. Victor Fowles, of First Baptist Church in Lake Wales, found a way to "accomplish something for the Lord," when she asked her neighbors if they would like to try a coffee-dialogue about the Bible. The response was overwhelming, she said.

One result noted in the coffee-dialogues has been the close friendships and togetherness formed among the neighborhood women who attend the sessions, the women say.

"Garden clubs just hit the surface," said Mrs. D.H. Bowen, a member of Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta. "In the coffee-dialogues we talk about things that deeply affect people's lives," she said.

Women attending the sessions discuss life after death, what Jesus Christ means to them, how the Bible applies to daily life and the special needs of those present, among other topics.

The atmosphere of the dialogues eventually cuts through doctrinal differences to a basic sharing of Jesus' love, say participants. "We frequently find points of agreement in our faiths," said Mrs. Theresa Luna of Nueva Vida Baptist Church in San Antonio.

"We don't stress Baptist beliefs. As a matter of fact, I'm the only Baptist in our group," Mrs. Bowen said.

In addition to "fellowship" between women of different Christian denominations, participants say the neighborhood sessions provide an opportunity for individual "witnessing" to persons who "might not know Jesus Christ in a personal way."

"I believe the home is the ideal place for witnessing," Mrs. Sehested said.

Mrs. Bowen said, "Women will come to my home for a chat when I could never get them to church. We've often gotten excited as we get deeper meaning from the Scriptures." Her neighborhood's dialogues are "general Bible studies," she added.

A WMU spokesman said the coffee-dialogue concept among Baptist Women is gaining momentum, partially because of the current Southern Baptist Convention theme for 1973-74, "Sharing Christ Through His Word."

The coffee-dialogues program relates also to the observance of the Baptist World Alliance-sponsored "World Mission of Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ," the WMU spokesman said.

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Dale Helmbold is a news intern from Samford University, Birmingham, working for the Woman's Missionary Union, also in Birmingham.

Fund Raising Effort Saves
Churches \$6 Million

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12/14/73

NASHVILLE (BP)--Thirty-five churches in 15 states pledged more than \$7.2 million during the 1972-73 fiscal year, saving more than \$6 million in interest, through the Together We Build program of the church and institutional fund raising section of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission.

The program, which uses no Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget funds for salaries or expenses, provides consultation to Southern Baptist churches in fund raising for building campaigns.

"According to calculations," says Bill Wilson, assistant director of church and institutional fund raising, "the 35 churches would have had to pay \$6,000,038 in interest if they had borrowed the \$7,255,186 their members pledged through our fund raising campaigns. That's figured at nine per cent interest over 15 years." Wilson said total payback of borrowed funds would have amounted to \$13,255,224 in principal and interest.

"Churches are encouraged to raise as much as possible, over and above regular tithes and offerings, through the Together We Build program before borrowing through lending institutions or church bond programs," said Robert G. Capra, director of the five-man church and institutional fund raising section.

"That way," he says, "they can cut down on long-range debts and free thousands of dollars for missions, staff support, local program ministries and giving through the Cooperative Program. A church which uses outlined follow-up procedures of the Together We Build program will usually collect 90-95 per cent of the amount pledged--perhaps more."

During the 1971-72 fiscal year, 24 churches in 13 states pledged \$3,837,200 for local building programs, using the Stewardship Commission's Together We Build plan.

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Baptist Educators Endorse
Hong Kong Baptist College

12/14/73

HOUSTON, Tex. (BP)--The Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools and the Southern Baptist Education Commission affirmed here that academic credits of Hong Kong Baptist College are generally equivalent to bachelor of arts or bachelor of science degrees from any Southern Baptist college in the States.

The action, taken during meetings of the two bodies here, was based on a study conducted by Ben C. Fisher, the Education Commission's executive secretary, at the request of the college and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The Hong Kong Baptist Association operates Hong Kong Baptist College.

Fisher's study has also drawn the attention of Gordon W. Sweet, executive secretary of the commission on colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, major accrediting agency for Southern schools.

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Sweet said in a letter to Fisher, "It is a fine report and in itself should assist the college with its relations with other institutions and people."

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools cannot officially grant accreditation to Hong Kong Baptist College because it is outside the geographical boundaries of its jurisdiction, but Sweet said, "I would be delighted to talk with you in detail about the college and to assist you with an evaluation visit. . . Perhaps an evaluation report could be effectively used by the institution."

During his study of Hong Kong Baptist College, Fisher applied the same accreditation standards used by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Periodically, the association asks Fisher to assist with accreditation evaluation of colleges in the States.

All Southern Baptist colleges in the States have been granted accreditation either through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or another regional accrediting agency.

In other developments Abner McCall, president of Baylor University, Waco, Tex., and president of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, was named chairman of the steering committee for the National Colloquium on Christian Higher Education planned at an undetermined location in 1976.

Members of the Education Commission's board and appropriate representatives from the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools will make up the steering committee.

Representatives from church and educational leadership will be named to a national advisory committee for the colloquium.

At a dinner meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, Bruce Heilman, president of the University of Richmond (Va.), told the Baptist educators that a school without a president with long-range plans has little hope of producing funds for current financial needs.

The Education Commission and the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools met concurrently with the meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

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Texas Baptist State
Offering Tops \$1 Million

12/14/73

DALIAS (BP)--Texas Baptists, for the first time in history, have given more than \$1 million for state missions causes through the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Eula Mae Henderson, executive director of the state Woman's Missionary Union, announced the offering totaled \$1,010,058.

Baptist General Convention of Texas leaders expressed hope the offering will continue to mount during the remaining weeks of 1973.

Last year, Texas Baptists raised a record \$903,730 for state missions causes.

T. A. Patterson, retiring Texas Baptist executive secretary, said, "Though \$1 million may not seem large in a state the size of Texas, when it's backed up by thousands of volunteer workers from all walks of life, it reaches infinitely far."

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Georgia Baptists Break
Ground for New Center

12/14/73

ATLANTA (BP)--Georgia Southern Baptists broke ground here for a major new \$5.5 million Baptist Administration and Communications Center to house the headquarters of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia.

Ceremonies took place on a 25-acre tract adjacent to Mercer University in Atlanta, a Southern Baptist school. The convention bought the tract from Atlanta Baptist College, now Mercer in Atlanta, in 1972.

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Searcy S. Garrison, the convention's executive secretary-treasurer, said the center will house over 200,000 square feet of floor space and should be completed by mid-1975.

Negotiations are now underway for a long-term lease of the present Georgia Baptist Building property in the heart of downtown Atlanta on historic Peachtree Street, which the convention has occupied since 1943. If finalized, the lease should bring Georgia Baptists about \$20 million over the life of a 70-year lease.

In other developments, the convention's executive committee approved a 1974 state budget of \$1,265,635 for Georgia Baptists and organized a statewide effort to raise \$1 million for the 1974 state missions offering in Georgia--an offering which has been producing about \$250,000 a year. All beyond \$250,000 will go to the new administration and communications center.

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Stevens Selected For
ABC Panel Discussion

12/14/73

FORT WORTH (BP)--Paul M. Stevens, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission here, has been selected to participate in a panel discussion on the year-end "Directions" program of the American Broadcasting Company.

The panel, composed of Stevens and representatives from other religious groups, will discuss religious and moral issues of 1973 and project issues expected to confront the American religious community in 1974.

Moderated by Frank Reynolds, ABC news commentator, the panel also includes representatives of Catholics and Jews and the National Council of Churches. Stevens has appeared on the annual program previously.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The program mentioned above is currently scheduled to be aired at 1 p.m. (EST), Dec. 30.