

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 25, 1975

75-30

**Tornado Destroys Church's
Building in Little Rock**

LITTLE ROCK (BP)--Two Baptist churches sustained damage to property as a tornado struck the city demolishing the building of Crystal Hills Church and hospitalizing the pastor.

Damage resulted also to homes of several Baptists in the area, including that of W. O. Vaught, the pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, and president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The Vaught home is still livable and they were not injured, according to reports.

Tornadoes, high winds, rains and snow and ice storms that affected at least five states otherwise caused little other apparent damage to Baptist property the weekend of February 22-23, reports indicated.

Other damage to Baptist property included a broken picture window at the Baptist Book Store in Nashville, due to high winds. And the Olivet Baptist Church in Little Rock lost a portable building in the tornado.

Don Hook, the pastor of Crystal Hills Church told the Arkansas Baptist that the church building was a "total loss." No dollar estimate of damages was available.

Betty Kennedy, managing editor of the Arkansas Baptist, said "I'd say the Crystal Hills building was demolished. The walls are standing, but the back and roof are gone. And it looks like the biggest part of the inside is gone."

Hook said he was inside the church's parsonage a few blocks away when the tornado struck. He was hospitalized after a wall collapsed on his legs and doctors feared complications from blood clots. The parsonage was a total loss and the church expected to recover about \$20,000 in insurance, Hook said.

The church may be able to save some pews and the church's organ was intact but "probably ruined," Hook said.

Toys, supplies and other items were found scattered over several miles. In a cemetery on the hill behind the church, the tombstone of the late Harry Harvey, said to be the church's founder, was knocked off its base.

Two members of the Crystal Hills church narrowly escaped injury and possible death from the tornado.

"Butch" Harvey was driving on the road near the church with seven nieces and nephews when he saw the tornado. He pulled into the church lot and everyone laid on the car floor-board. The storm passed over the car, breaking all its windows. No one was seriously injured in the car, yet the church was demolished.

In another incident, Jesse Weaver, chairman of deacons at Crystal Hills and the church's janitor, had started for the church and would have been there when the tornado hit had he not decided to stop by a friend's house.

Several members of the church lost their homes, although no serious injuries were noted. The church expects to rebuild by fall or early winter, 1975, Hook said.

The church is presently meeting at a nearby elementary school and held their first Sunday services after the tornado on the church grounds, where they sang hymns and had a "season of prayer."

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Three staff members of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention reported damage to their homes and property. Mrs. Jeannie Weber, secretary in the convention's Brotherhood department, and husband, moved out after the tornado lifted the roof and "squashed it back down on the walls." She and her husband were in the house at the time, but neither were injured. The homes of Don Cooper, associate in the Arkansas Sunday School department, and of bookkeeper Mrs. Jeannie Breedlove, had minor damage.

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One Mexican Church
Claims 10,000 in VBS

Baptist Press
2/25/75

TAPACHULA, Mex. (BP)--First Baptist Church here claims what may be a world's record--10,000 in Vacation Bible School (VBS) for 1974.

"That's right. Our church enrolled 10,000 children in VBS in 1974," Joel Panama Ortiz, the pastor of First Baptist told Anne Washburn McWilliams in an interview for the Baptist Record of Mississippi.

The record article noted the 500-member church last summer sponsored 53 VBSs. Schools were held in homes with morning, afternoon and night shifts for six weeks. Some afternoon and evening schools had departments for young people and adults.

"In my 36-year ministry, it's the biggest thing I ever head of," said Orvil Reid, Southern Baptist representative to Mexico.

First Church in Tapachula accomplished the VBS feat in a city of 90,000 population. Last summer 153 workers from the church cooperated in five worker teams. Some worked in four schools a day for six weeks, with 381 professions of faith in Jesus Christ reported.

Results have included two new missions, and seven Bible classes begun with 700-800 children in attendance.

Ortiz has been the First Church pastor nine years. A native of Cacahuatan, he became a Christian at age 15. He told of one girl who asked Jesus Christ into her life at a VBS.

"That afternoon her unsaved grandmother became very sick. The little girl walked an hour trying to find where her Vacation Bible School teacher lived, to ask her to go and pray for her grandmother, and to tell her about Jesus.

"The teacher went to the home," Ortiz said, "and won the grandmother to the Lord."

Every church in the local Baptist association with which the Tapachula church cooperates took part in the VBS effort, the Baptist Record noted.

From four schools in 1972, the churches went to 153 schools in 1974, Chiapas Association with 27 churches and 1,700 members, last year sponsored 153 schools with an enrolment of almost 17,000.

Catholic parents are more willing to allow their children to attend the Baptist VBSs if they are held in homes, it was discovered.

"The 27 churches of the Chiapas Association with 1,700 members had over 10 in VBS for every member," Reid noted. "First Church, Tapachula, had at least one profession of faith for every two members. The association had almost one profession of faith for each member."

Reid has challenged Mexico City Baptists to plan at least 1,000 Bible schools in 1975 and challenged the country to hold 5,000 of the schools, the Baptist Record said.

The Tapachula achievement is "probably a world record," mused Reid.

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ADD

Add as 3rd graph in BP story of 2/24/75 headlined "Fletcher Resigns FMB Post; Enters Tennessee Pastorate"--

The Knoxville church has been without a pastor since Charles Trentham resigned in December, 1973 to become the pastor of First Baptist Church, Washington, D. C.

Thanks, Baptist Press

Baptist Controversy, Unity
Themes at Editors Meeting

By Stan Hasteley

MOBILE (BP)--A Southern Baptist historian said here that although controversy is inevitable in the denomination's life, Baptists have been able to maintain an "uncanny unity."

Walter Shurden, who currently serves as president of the Southern Baptist Historical Society, told the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Press Association that "the Baptist denominational consciousness has been fostered more by the unity which comes from a commitment to diversity than by the unity which comes from uniformity."

The Carson-Newman College Professor of Church History delivered two addresses to the press association, which consists of editors of all Baptist state newspapers and a number of other denominational publications.

In one speech, Shurden examined Baptist crises in historical perspective, saying that Southern Baptists are beset by a faulty view of denominational history. "Many Southern Baptists," he stated, "live with the erroneous belief that history is valueless, that the study of the past is a plaything."

That view is characterized by the "conventional faith that Baptist history began with the last meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention," Shurden said.

He noted, however, that there have always been small groups within the convention devoted to denominational history and that a number of present-day publications are indicators that the study of Baptist history is on the rise.

Shurden, who authored the recent Broadman book, "Not a Silent People," which deals with Southern Baptist controversies, told the editors that denominational conflicts are inevitable because of the "twin pillars of individualism and congregationalism. These are basic Baptist principles," he continued, "democratic in nature, which not only allow controversy--they feed it."

He listed the Baptist concepts of salvation, the church, creeds, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and the priesthood of believers as examples of such individualism and congregationalism.

Despite the inevitability of controversy, Shurden emphasized, Baptists have surprisingly maintained a large measure of unity.

A number of forces have contributed to that unity, he said, including general agreement on a common body of distinctives, pietism, a voluntary organization, and the acceptance of diversity itself.

In a separate address, Shurden told the editors that keeping silence and speaking out are both necessary in the context of denominational life.

Declaring "there is no such thing as absolute freedom of the press," Shurden said that silence is sometimes preferable to speaking out when battles are raging or when a minor issue might be elevated to major status by publicity.

Editors must speak out, he said, when Christian personalities are abused, when the issues are confused, and when basic ideals are undermined.

The editors also heard a former White House aide in the Nixon administration pay tribute to the role of the press in the unraveling of the Watergate affair.

Wallace Henley, who held a number of posts within the Nixon White House but now is the pastor of Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church near Mobile, said the "salting of the press" was a critical factor in uncovering the Watergate scandals.

"Watergate," he said, "was the horrid result of the institutionalization of the institution of the presidency."

Henley warned that the Southern Baptist Convention is also a "political institution with the same vulnerability as any other political institution." That in itself is not evil, he said.

"Sin enters the scene," he continued, "when the politics of servanthood is reduced to the politics of survival."

He said further that although the denominational press "is too much a child of the institution to take the fully independent role," state editors "are free in a way many other Southern Baptist communicators are not."

In its final session, the press association endorsed a resolution calling for personal and ecclesiastical integrity "in all our relationships."

The meeting's overall theme, "Toward a New Birth of Freedom through Integrity," had earlier been highlighted in a series of four devotional messages by James O. Duncan of Washington, D. C., the retired editor of the Capital Baptist.

Officers elected for 1975-1976 were C. Eugene Whitlow, editor of the Baptist New Mexican, president; Hudson Baggett, editor of the Alabama Baptist, president elect; and R. G. Puckett, editor of the Maryland Baptist, secretary-Treasurer.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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