(BP) -- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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April 16, 1975 75-60

Baptist Missionaries Will
Assess Return to Vietnam

RICHMOND (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries to South Vietnam, temporarily scattered in other countries of Southeast Asia, soon will discuss their future and the future of Baptist work in Vietnam with their area secretary.

R. Keith Parks, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Southeast Asia, will visit Southeast Asia and help assess the Vietnam situation and its affect on Southern Baptist mission work.

He will visit with all of the 39 Vietnam missionaries, counseling them concerning options for either temporary interim assignments or permanent reassignments in other countries.

"Most of the missionaries are hopeful that Vietnam will stabilize and aren't ready to consider reassignments," Parks said. "Some, due to various circumstances, are thinking in terms of reassignment." Thirty-nine SBC missionaries are assigned to Vietnam, including six on furlough when the evacuation occurred.

Missionary Earl Bengs, in an April 14 telephone conversation with Parks, described the atmosphere in Saigon just prior to his departure on April 12 as "a little more calm and stable." He had not encountered or observed any overt anti-Americanism, Parks said.

Parks indicated a "strong possibility" exists that if the situation remains as open as it is now, a couple of the missionary men could shuttle in and out, staying 10 or 12 days at a time. They would counsel and work with the Vietnamese Baptist organization presently functioning and maintain missionary presence in the country as long as it seems feasible.

The Capitol Baptist Association, a national organization set up to maintain Baptist work and continue refugee relief efforts, is not only involved in relief work, but is "trying to maintain a continuation of the basic Baptist work there" such as publication work and the Christian Social ministries program, according to Parks.

Another purpose for Parks' trip is to evaluate what Southern Baptists can do to minister to the needs of the many refugees. Parks also mentioned the need to consider the logistical problem of functioning financially as a mission while the missionaries are out of the country.

If Parks and the Vietnam missionaries see any value in his going into Vietnam, he will visit the country, but plans are indefinite, Parks said.

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White Baptist Congregation
Turns Away Black Visitors

Baptist Press
4/16/75

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (BP)--A black college professor, who was turned away, along with his class in "black religious experience," from a white Baptist church here, said the episode "pains" him because he does not want his students to think the rebuff represents "the essence of Christianity."

"If that were true, they would have to reject Christianity So would I. But that type of response is not the essence of Christianity," Dorsey Blake told Baptist Press.

Blake, a professor at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa and pastor of a rural black National Baptist church in Boligee, Ala., added that he knows all white Baptists do not agree with racism, but that would also be difficult for his students to understand.

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He said his father, William L. Blake, now a pastor in Omaha, Neb., graduated from a Southern Baptist seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., in 1961.

The rebuff incident occurred Sunday, April 13, when Blake took about 27 black members of his class to the morning worship service at Alberta Baptist Church. The church, with more than 1,600 members, is the third largest congregation in the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association of Southern Baptist churches. Reportedly, blacks have attended some other churches in the association with no incident.

As they approached the door, Blake said, a white man said, "We don't seat colored here."

While the discussion ensued at the door, it struck him forcefully, Blake said, that th congregation inside was singing the doxology--"Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him all creatures here below . . ."

Blake said he perhaps could have expected some white church members to give a polite, but chilly response to a visiting black group but said he never expected to have the group turned away.

A member of the church called the police and about a dozen of them arrived and formed a cordon, although reports indicate no violence or abusiveness erupted and no charges w re filed. The police moved the group back to the sidewalk. Meanwhile, Blake said, he phoned the local press.

Blake said a man identifying himself as T. L. Gallman, chairman of the deacons, said they couldn't come in because they were there to disrupt services and to try to integrate the church.

"I told him that we were there only to observe worship of a white congregation," Blake said, "not to disrupt. I told him we had attended black churches, with some white students along, but had never had a negative experience." Blake said three white members of the class were not among those on the scene at Alberta Church.

"I told him that every semester we try to visit churches in the area to get practical insights into religious experience," Blake said. "Alberta Baptist Church is very close to the campus and, in the past, has had signs welcoming students.

"I reminded Mr. Gallman the church had advertised revival services in Saturday's Tuscaloosa News, which would begin Sunday, and had 'cordially invited' the public."

Gallman reportedly told Blake that the church's policy did not allow attendance by blacks. Later, he told the Tuscaloosa News: "They said they had come to worship, and I told them we did not have integration in our church. We had discussed this in church in the past and we decided not to open our doors to integration."

Another report indicates that the church has taken no official vote on attendance of blacks.

Blake said the group refused to leave until they talked to the pastor, Joe Bob Mizzell, who r portedly knew nothing of the events occurring outside. He said Gallman and others refused to call Mizzell out of the service. Blake eventually refused an offer to meet with the pastor and one of the students after the service.

The entire group had been rebuffed, Blake told Baptist Press, and "I felt as if he should talk to the whole group." He said he has subsequently written Mizzell a letter, asking him to visit the class for a discussion.

During the course of the discussion outside, Blake said, an unidentified white man, apparently a church member, said, "There is a Nigger church around the corner."

Mizzell, pastor of the church for about nine months, elected not to discuss the situation with the press, but a source said the situation distressed the pastor.

Mizzell reportedly is an Alabama National Guard chaplain who preaches regularly to integrated groups and Mrs. Mizzell teaches in an integrated school. Mizzell, the source said, is "open in the area of race relations and wants to keep this thing low key and try to bring about healing."

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By W. A. Reed

NASHVILLE (BP)--Five years ago a joint worship service, begun by a black Baptist church and white Baptist church here, meant polite smiles and speeches about brotherhood.

The fifth joint program between the two congregations on a recent Sunday, however, generated a genuine atmosphere of mutual admiration. The smiles had turned into joyful group singing and sporadic "Amens."

The morning service was held at Woodmont Baptist Church, a predominantly white, Southern Baptist congregation, and the evening service at Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church, a black National Baptist congregation.

"It's good we know each other by name, for we have to worship the true God through Jesus Christ, and he is the God who made black, white, yellow, brown, red and green," said Bill Sherman, pastor of the Woodmont Church.

Enoch Jones, pastor of the Fifteenth Avenue church, said "Jesus is the architect, the Bible is His blueprint and the Holy Spirit is His interpreter."

Jones was preaching from the pulpit of the white Woodmont Church. Behind him was the 50-voice choir from his church, his chief of deacons, Earl Williams, and choir director James Scandrick.

In front were the combined congregations of the two churches, who have been meeting together from time to time to help overcome the racial segregation characteristic of Nashville's churches of every faith.

"It would be wonderful if every church, black or white, had a brother or sister church that they could meet with, for we are all members of the human family, and persons ought to be free to go worship anywhere," Sherman said.

He told a television audience that Jesus Christ is big enough to rid every person of their hangups and negative feelings about others.

Although some churches in Nashville have black, white and hispanic memberships, only two other congregations--both Baptist--share services occasionally. They are the Glendale Baptist Church, a white congregation, and the New Hope Baptist Church, a black group.

In his sermon, Jones said many people, both inside and outside the church, are "half-built" like some houses, and they panic when trouble comes, but he said all would be better off to remember the words of the Apostle Paul:

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God--a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens."

Jones told the combined congregation to build their lives, not on money or fame, but on Jesus Christ, a solid rock.

The people all held hands as they sang together the closing hymn "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness."

Sherman delivered the message at the evening service at Fifteenth Avenue Church and the Woodmont youth choir sang.

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W. A. R ed is religion n ws editor of the Nashville Tennessean.

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'Denominational Identity Key
To Publications' Survival'

By James Lee Young

NASHVILLE (BP)--Church news publications and journals that broaden their audience base to the point of losing their denominational identity and uniqueness are signing their own death warrants, the executive secretary of Associated Church Press (ACP) said here.

Denominational papers and magazines which succeed tend to do so "by being conscious of their limitations" and by preserving themselves as denominationally-specialized but not as "house organs," said Dennis E. Shoemaker, at a joint meeting of ACP and th Nashville chapter of the Religious Public Relations Council.

Shoemaker, an ordained United Presbyterian minister and journalist, addressed himself primarily to national church publications. But he noted later that the criteria for success also could apply equally to regional publications, such as Baptist state papers.

The future of religious communications depends "on a sharpening rather than diffusing of specific identity," Shoemaker said, citing examples of publications which have failed because they lost sight of their purpose.

"People are yearning for something, anything, that says to them, 'I'm me.' In religious journalism this calls for saying, 'I'm a Methodist,'" or a Baptist or whatever the case, Shoemaker noted.

"What has been lost in the modern culture is a sense of special belonging . . .

"We . . . are learning that corporate interdependence requires for its fulfillment a special belonging, a rootage, history, ideology, value system and locality that is too easily hidden in a computerized and electronic society.

"Religious journalism, sensitive to that loss, could make an important contribution through pointing with pride to the specific uniqueness of our spiritual heritage" as denominations

But, Shoemaker stressed, "We are now in a condition of 'red alert' where the rule is 'subsidize or perish' and, with that, all the hazards and tensions that come with assistance must be endured.

"There is evidence," he said, "that the general church publication cannot stand on its own, although this isn't true for every case."

On the other side of the coin from loss of identity, he said, an error is made when a publication--sometimes attempting to find or keep denominational identity--"loses its soul to the bureaucracy it serves. Every effort must be made not to be in bed with bureaucrats," he said. That, too, will lead to failure.

There is "virtue" in taking the reader's side . . . This means use of 'raw' news . . . that doesn't gloss over reality with an ecclesiastical paintbrush . . ."

Denominational publications have a poor record in handling and carrying discussion of controversial issues within the church, Shoemaker observed.

"In the end, the question that must be resolved for the denominational journal is,'Whose publication is it?'"

If it is the communication vehicle of a people whose identity has been clarified, it can then "become a forum for the engagement of human beings who live in community, however uneasily."

If, instead, the publication avoids the issues, the readers will turn to other avenues of communication that aren't afraid to deal with problems affecting their denomination or convention, Shoemaker said.

Shoemaker painted a generally dismal outlook for national church publications and magazines. He cited as an example the demise of United Methodists monthly publication Today, which will be discontinued this June.

Th decision leaves the 10-million member United Methodist Church without a g n ral publication, Shoemaker said.

He outlined several reasons for Today's failure but noted the evidence indicat s the publication, and its predecessor, Together, may have had greater impact and success if they had "steered a course that was more, rather than less, Methodist in character."

ACP, which Shoemaker heads, has 200 member publications from Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox denominations in the United States and Canada.

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