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**ABCCM Catches Those Who
'Fall Through the Cracks'**

By Toby Druin

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)--As the lines for unemployment compensation, food stamps and other social services have lengthened at government agencies here, the traffic also has increased to and through the house at 201 Broadway.

That's the address of Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministries (ABCCM), an organization of 63 churches, 16 of them Southern Baptist. ABCCM's purpose, according to the Asheville-Buncombe catalog of social services, is "to assist needy in cooperation with other agencies and when the services of other agencies are not available or applicable."

Robert Wiltshire, the young, bearded executive director, states it more succinctly: "We're here catching the people who fall through the cracks."

Organized in 1969 by a group of Methodists, Lutherans and others--no Baptists at first--ABCCM now has a home at the Broadway address, purchased for \$10,000, a staff of three fulltime employees, countless volunteers and a budget of \$45,000.

Baptists got into the act late, but a number of volunteers and a big chunk of the budget now come from Baptist sources. One Baptist church, for instance, recently designated two percent of its gross receipts for ABCCM.

Wiltshire became ABCCM's executive director during the tenure of Fred Werhan, pastor of Hominy Baptist Church, Candler, N.C., as ABCCM president. A graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York, Wiltshire came to Asheville looking for a ministry. He met Werhan, now ABCCM's immediate past president, and was asked to head the organization.

ABCCM has a food pantry, clothes closet, furniture and small amounts of solid fuel--wood and coal--for those in need. But it also offers attentive ears to the peoples' problems.

Wiltshire's associates on the staff are Warren Bock, also pastor at Calvary United Presbyterian Church, and Mary Lou Hammonds, who concentrates on one-to-one interviews.

"We see ourselves as a mission--making the word flesh, making the gospel real to folks, doing whatever it takes to help them down life's road," says Wiltshire.

"We're primarily a social ministry, but occasionally we get an opportunity to point someone in a spiritual direction.

"We have to deal with their physical problems first, but often, when they are open to see beyond those problems, we move to helping them with their spiritual well-being, too."

But lately, the physical needs have been increasing. In the first nine months of 1974, Wiltshire says, the center averaged only about 100 new families per month.

As the economic pinch grew in the fall, the number almost doubled and has continued to grow. On a recent Monday, 63 persons went through the center. The center keeps files on each person and family and encourages churches to contact them if someone comes in for help.

The increase in the number of persons asking for help is reflective of the fact that more are hurting, Wiltshire said, but also of the fact that the Buncombe County Commissioners recently gave ABCCM \$25,000 to aid people affected by the current recession.

"There is no such thing as a typical call or request," Wiltshire says. "The most common variable is that the person just doesn't know where to turn.

"When they have a problem with a bill we try to find as much as we can about their means, budget, etc., but also try to give them a little sense of what we see as options--the unnecessary things in their expenditures draining away their money.

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"We also try to make them aware of the various social services available in the community and help them through the system--shoehorn them in."

However, many people who come to the center, Wiltshire says, come because they simply could get no help from the social services agencies.

"They (the agencies) can take only a limited number of people," he says. "For instance, their appointments for a month usually are scheduled in half a day.

"They can't meet these extraordinary circumstances. I don't know why they don't have more workers, but those who are there can interview only about eight to ten persons a day. It's mentally exhausting. But that leaves a lot of people waiting to see someone about help."

Wiltshire, Bock and Mrs. Hammonds interview most of these seeking aid from ABCCM, but they depend on volunteers from the member churches to operate the pantry, clothes closet and other services.

"We are very pleased that a variety of people are volunteering," Wiltshire says. "The churches send volunteers one day a month, though many work more than that.

"We have had students from the University of North Carolina at Asheville and Western Carolina, and one Mars Hill College student worked during the January mini-mester helping the people improve their nutrition.

"We've also had some unemployed persons volunteering their services. Some looking for jobs in social service come in and work for the experience."

One woman heard Wiltshire preach and has followed it up with more than 120 volunteer hours revamping the clothing room.

People from all walks of life give their time. One day a woman from the exclusive Biltmore Forest area of Asheville worked in the clothing room with an ex-convict from Craggy Prison.

The center makes monthly collections of food from each participating church. The pantry has had a big drain in recent months because of the time lag involved in getting food stamps.

"We're in constant need of baby clothes, oversized clothes, work shoes and work clothes," Wiltshire says. Too many people, he noted, give clothing that must be dry cleaned and more often than not has to be discarded after being soiled because the people don't have the money to have it cleaned.

"I also wish people would realize that helping the needy doesn't necessarily mean that you give them only your discards," he says.

Wiltshire says the economic pinch is expected to ease somewhat this summer with seasonal employment. Asheville is a tourism center.

Next winter will depend on the national trend.

"I wonder if there will be any carryover of the empathy after the crunch of the present recession has passed?" he asks. "I think one of the challenges of the churches will be to keep the memory alive."

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(BP) Photos mailed to Baptist state papers. Available to others on request.

Adapted from June-July, 1975, issue of Home Missions magazine.

**SBC Giving Stays Ahead
During First Nine Months**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Although overall giving in June lagged some, the Southern Baptist Convention's national Cooperative Program unified budget, through the first 9 months of the 1974-75 fiscal year, continues to remain ahead of 1973-74 giving at the same point.

Receipts for the first 9 months--including both Cooperative Program and designated gifts--total \$64,734,551 7.94 percent higher--than 1973-74.

Cooperative Program receipts, sent undesignated by state Baptist conventions for use in the SBC's worldwide causes, total \$30,909,027 through the first 9 months. That's 7.43 percent above the 1973-74 figure.

Designated giving for the first 9 months totals \$33,825,523--some 8.40 percent ahead of 1973-74.

In June, however, a lag in designated giving dropped total receipts some 1.85 percent behind the June, 1974 level. June designated giving totaled \$2.22 million.

Cooperative Program receipts of \$3,347,910 in June registered 6.05 percent higher than June of the previous year.

Designated giving in June showed a great contrast to May, in which receipts of \$5,270,466 were 23.20 percent (\$92,531) ahead of May, 1974. May's Cooperative Program figures showed an 8.12 percent increase over May, 1974, rising from \$3.44 million to \$3.72 million.

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High Court Term in Review:
Action, Inaction Revisited

Baptist Press
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By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--Actions by the U.S. Supreme Court in its just-concluded term can be described as a "mixed bag" in the areas of church-state relations and human rights.

On the positive side, the high court issued its most definitive decision to date opposing state aid to parochial schools, stood firmly by its controversial 1973 abortion position, and agreed to hear a case next term which should go a long way in deciding the validity of state aid to nonpublic colleges and universities.

On the other hand, the court disappointed many observers by holding over any decision on the constitutionality of the death penalty and by refusing to clarify its ambiguous stance on obscenity and pornography.

By its tendency to avoid making tough decisions and issuing opinions instead based on procedural questions, the Burger court is steadily gaining a reputation for acting definitively only when absolutely necessary. Some, including former President Richard M. Nixon, have called such a judicial posture "strict constructionism." Others see it, instead, as obstructionism.

The contrast with the Supreme Court, under the leadership of the late Chief Justice Earl Warren, is inevitable. Whereas that court jumped at the opportunity to confront controversial questions headon, the Burger court seems often to go out of its way to avoid them, even when written briefs and oral arguments have sought them out.

While some observers defend the new cautiousness and regard it as a needed corrective to what they viewed as the "social engineering" done during the Warren years, the fact remains that by adopting a posture of "decide only when absolutely necessary" the high court is encouraging protracted litigation of the same cases. That, in turn, is contributing to the growing log jam of cases in the federal court system.

All this comes at a time when Chief Justice Burger is making a concerted effort to convince Congress that an overhauled federal court system is imperative. Burger is crusading for more judgeships and for better pay for federal judges, whose salaries have been frozen at \$40,000-42,500 for six years, causing a huge exodus of seasoned ones to private practice.

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Unfortunately, the chief justice's Capitol Hill lobbying does not seem to square with his judicial philosophy of avoiding deciding cases on their merits and deciding them rather on procedural grounds. Instead of dispatching cases expeditiously, he appears committed to the view that the Supreme Court should act on many controversial matters only reluctantly.

The most obvious recent example was the court's decision (or non-decision) to delay making a judgment as to the constitutionality of the death penalty. In the case of Jesse Thurman Fowler, a convicted murderer from North Carolina, the court was asked by both sides to determine whether the death penalty itself constitutes "cruel and unusual punishment" in violation of the Constitution's Eighth Amendment.

Although the case was remarkably free from other potentially complicating questions, the high court still declined to issue a ruling, deciding instead to hear the case again next term. The likely explanation for the delay is that the court was so badly divided that a definitive decision, one which would establish a firm precedent, was impossible to reach. This, in turn, would seem to bode ill for those hoping for the banning of the death penalty, because it indicates, at the very least, that a strong minority of the justices are holding out in favor of execution.

A clearer example of this court's unwillingness to meet certain hard questions head on is its posture on obscenity and pornography. Two years ago it issued a ruling in *Miller v. California* declaring that local communities may determine what is obscene for their own citizens. On the surface, that sounds reasonable enough.

What it really represented was a classic example of the non-decision the Burger court is prone to make. What, after all, constitutes local standard? The aftermath of that decision has been predictable--an endless stream of appeals working themselves all the way to the high court, where, in turn, they must be considered one by one in a painfully time-consuming process.

In the wake of the ambiguous *Miller* decision, the court was forced during its latest term to declare that the stage production of "Hair" cannot be banned by local communities because it contains a nude scene and that drive-in theaters cannot be forbidden by a city to show films containing nudity when the screen is visible from streets or other public places.

This is not to say that the present court never makes momentous decisions. It has demonstrated, to the contrary, that it is capable of lucid opinions which will undoubtedly serve as strong precedents for future cases.

The most notable example during the recent term was *Meek v. Pittenger*, the case which successfully challenged Pennsylvania's massive aid to nonpublic schools scheme. That plan provided millions of dollars yearly to parochial schools in the state for "auxiliary services."

The high court's decision was the most definitive yet in this prickly, highly emotional field. The court declared that Pennsylvania's plan was squarely opposed to the First Amendment's prohibition of church-state entanglement. By a solid 6-3 majority, the court issued an opinion which will make it most difficult for state legislatures to circumvent constitutional arguments in seeking to pass such plans in the future.

The court was also called upon to stand by its highly controversial 1973 abortion decisions which declared that the state has no interest in the termination of pregnancy within the first trimester and only a limited interest during the second trimester. It did so, thereby reaffirming a courageous decision which should also stand up well for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the picture of the recent term is blurred. Despite a general tendency to avoid clear-cut statements in some controversial areas, the court has nevertheless shown that it can do so in others. Civil libertarians can hope that as the four Nixon appointees to the high court gain seasoning those latter occasions will be more and more frequent.