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**Church Members Till Soil  
On the Lord's Grounds**

By Jim Kulp

ALTON, Ill. (BP)--Members of First Southern Baptist Church here found a way to use temporarily idle land and help beat the economic crunch.

The program has proven such a success that the church plans to continue it even after it completes a 1,100-seat auditorium and, eventually, an educational-activities building.

While waiting for their building plans to take shape, members of the church decided to utilize some 20 acres of idle land.

Last year, the congregation offered the land to its members and friends for vegetable gardens.

Twenty-six persons took advantage of the offer.

This year the number has doubled and some 52 garden plots have been laid out on two to three acres at the site on the outskirts of town.

Church members have been diligently tilling, raking, hoeing, planting and weeding.

The gardeners sowed a wide variety of vegetables--from okra to peppers and from squash to corn.

To make it easier for the church's gardeners, many of them amateurs, a farmer was hired to plow up the area.

Then the acreage was divided into garden plots averaging about 25 by 50 feet in size. Each plot was numbered and then offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

The site's unofficial name is "Alton Baptist Gardens," but the garden offer is not restricted to church members, said Howard Taylor, the pastor.

Leftover plots were given to other interested persons in the community. A Presbyterian and a few Catholics accepted garden space and work right along with the Baptists.

The gardeners help each other. One man, who had knee surgery, couldn't work his plot, so other gardeners pitched in to work it for him, Taylor said. And one church member owns a gasoline powered tiller and cultivates for fellow gardeners.

"We didn't know what the response would be when we first offered the site," Taylor said.

"We had all this ground and knew it was rich soil because it had been a truck farm at one time," he said. "We also knew a lot of our people lived in the city and didn't have the space for a garden. So we decided to plow it up and subdivide it into gardens."

Besides helping beat the economic crunch, providing satisfying work and improving the appearance of the site, the gardening effort has had another wholesome side effect.

Whole families turn out to work the garden, building a sense of closeness and commonness of purpose as small children play alongside and parents, older children and senior citizens chop weeds.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

Jim Kulp is a reporter for the Alton (Ill.) Evening Telegraph

## Offering In Reverse Turns Tables At Prayer Service

By Helen Parmley

DALLAS (BP)--Some of those attending a Baptist Wednesday night prayer service here left the church with more money than they had when they arrived.

After an offering was taken at Beverly Hills Baptist Church, pastor Howard Conatser directed the deacons to return to the congregation with the baskets of money.

"It's God's money," said Conatser. "If you need money and have asked God to help you get it, take what you need."

It was the only time a collection had been asked for at the weekly prayer service and before it was taken, Conatser told the congregation, "The church doesn't really need the money. We are already \$100,000 over our budget for this year.

"But you need to be blessed. You need to experience the grace of giving."

The pastor, who has been under fire from some corners of the Southern Baptist denomination for his charismatic ministry at the 4,000-member church, told The Dallas Morning News he had been preaching on the types of offerings described in the Old Testament scriptures.

He said the exception of taking an offering Wednesday night was a spontaneous reaction to those sermons.

"It was a 'wave offering,' a freewill offering," Conatser said. "No one came prepared for it, but more than \$1,000 was given."

He said most of the money was still there when the service ended. But for a few, the reversed collection was a Godsend.

One of the 950 persons attending the service told about a young man sitting next to him.

"He was clean, but shabbily dressed," he recalled. "When the baskets were redistributed, he slowly reached in and took a couple of bills, then raised his head and said, 'Praise the Lord.'"

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- Helen Parmley is religion editor of the Dallas Morning News.

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Day Center for Elderly  
Fulfills Minister's Dream

By Barbara Hunting

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TAMPA, Fla. (BP)--A day care center for senior citizens begun here in June, fulfills a lifelong dream of James Skipper, pastor of West Shore Baptist Church.

Although not a completely original idea, "It is the first one in Tampa," said Skipper, who noted that for \$17 per week elderly persons may involve themselves in an energetic, productive program to see the outside world.

The program includes field trips, arts and crafts, trips to shopping centers and malls, outings to see area universities and other programs to get the people out, Skipper said.

The only requirement for those attending the day care sessions is that they be able to participate in the activities being offered," he said.

"The two most neglected areas, as I see it, are the children and the aged," he said.

Windows in the West Shore Baptist Church day center, built and decorated just for senior citizens, face an area where younger children play. Seeing the young people all day gives a boost to the elderly. They can look and enjoy but not be disturbed by the noise, Skipper believes.

"I've taken many courses at college on aging. I majored in sociology, and I know what makes these people happy. Once the elderly begin to mix and communicate they begin to take pride in their appearance and to be more social.

The women begin to wear wigs and make-up and the men wear clean shirts and ties and before you know it miracles are happening," said Skipper.

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After people begin to know each other better, they find worshipping easier, too, the minister noted.

Where transportation is not available the church sends a bus to pick up the elderly.

"We would naturally prefer the people get to the church on their own, but for \$5 per week we will provide the transportation," he said.

Carle E. Christian of the Christian Counseling Center, sponsored by the Tampa Bay Baptist Association, is helping Skipper. And a registered nurse is on hand to help the elderly, as needed.

Skipper believes that the center will not only fill a need in the community but will be accepted by many families who could not otherwise provide recreational facilities for their loved ones.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist State Papers. Barbara Hunting is a reporter for the Tampa (Fla.) Tribune.

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RNA Gives Top

Baptist Press

1975 Writing Awards

7/8/75

ANAHEIM, Calif. (BP)--Three news media representatives won top 1975 awards of the Religious Newswriters' Association (RNA) during the RNA's 1975 annual meeting here.

Awards went to the Houston Chronicle, which won the RNA's Schachern Memorial Award for excellence in its religion pages, Louis A. Moore, religion editor; Miss Lee Kelley of the St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, who won the Supple Memorial Award for excellence in reporting; and Glenn Gilbert of the Ann Arbor (Mich.) News, who won the first annual Louis Cassels Memorial Award for excellence in reporting on small dailies or weeklies.

The award to the Houston Chronicle represents its second 1975 award for excellence in religion coverage. Earlier, the paper received an Award of Merit in Journalism from the Religious Public Relations Council (RPRC), a national interfaith organization, and Moore was named a Fellow of the RPRC.

The Saginaw (Mich.) News, Russell Chandler of the Los Angeles Times, and Miss Monica Williams of the Elyria (Ohio) Chronicle Telegram were runnersup in the RNA's Schachern, Supple and Cassels voting respectively.

The Cassels award was named after the United Press International's late, well-known religion writer, Louis Cassels. It had previously been given as a special Supple award. The Supple award is named in honor of the late James O. Supple of The Chicago Sun-Times and the Schachern award is in memory of Harold J. Schachern of the Detroit News.

The RNA's Supple Board of Managers holds the annual awards competition using judges outside the membership of RNA, an organization of more than 100 reporters who cover religion for the secular press.

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