

**Crusader's Chapel--Church  
For Physically Handicapped**

By Bonita Sparrow

FORT WORTH (BP)--The Sunday School teacher is paralyzed. His class members are on crutches or in wheel chairs. The pastor's Sunday morning audience consists of physically handicapped persons.

It's a normal Sunday service for Crusader's Chapel here, which recently observed its 20th anniversary. The Chapel has been the church home for two decades for persons who have been casualties yet have survived accidents, war and the trauma of birth or illness.

It's a "special church where the handicapped can grow and serve," says pastor Jerome Pillow, a vice president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

The church is mainly run by the physically handicapped and primarily to meet their needs. Although the Chapel has a history of hiring physically handicapped persons pastors, Pillow is "able-bodied."

He became pastor in 1972 and recognizes that "handicapped people are no more or no less religious but have the same problems as able-bodied persons, plus the physical handicaps, so the ministry is different.

"But I've found these people are go-getters, especially those who have been able-bodied and are now handicapped," Pillow said.

The Chapel became a reality in 1956, from an idea of Ronald Ballard, a handicapped man who operates an employment agency in Fort Worth. He was attending the University of Houston on a basketball scholarship when a rainy-night accident left him paralyzed from the neck down.

He was welcomed warmly but was shy and self-conscious about attending Fort Worth's Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in his wheel chair.

"I felt in the way, out in the aisle. The stairs were impossible. And people who wanted to shake hands were embarrassed when they realized I couldn't shake hands. I thought of the number of handicapped who never go to church for that very reason."

Ballard surveyed other physically disabled persons in the Fort Worth area and discovered only four or five out of about 70 actually attended church regularly. They were interested in the possibility of a church of their own.

Ballard took his idea to Mrs. Fred Swank, wife of Sagamore Hill's pastor. She, in turn, contacted the Tarrant Baptist Association office. The association offered to sponsor the Chapel as its mission and Sagamore Hill also offered to help sponsor the project.

The first meetings were at Riverside Recreation Center. For five years the group met at Crippled Childrens Building on Riverside Drive here. Now, they hold regular services in a ground-floor building especially designed for the handicapped. The building is debt-free. A \$25,000 note was paid off in 14 years.

The Chapel has extra-wide doors, large restrooms and individual movable auditorium chairs. These replacements for conventional pews allow members in wheel chairs to sit with other worshippers, rather than in the back of the auditorium, or in the aisles.

The Chapel's drive-in entrance is covered to protect participants from the weather while getting in and out of the car.

"Members with transportation stop on their way to church to pick up members who can't drive," said Leroy Hill, church treasurer. The Chapel also operates a van (nicknamed Casper) with a paid driver to pick up other members."

Hill, a certified public accountant, was confined to a wheel chair after "turning a Corvette over on myself" in 1958. While hospitalized, he heard about the Chapel from a polio victim.

"After I got out of rehabilitation I decided to look into it," he said. "I really think the best thing the Chapel has done has been in encouraging people who've been handicapped since birth.

"Many of them have spent most of their lives inside four walls. When they come to the Chapel they begin gradually coming out of their shells. They develop a real sense of self-worth as they realize that Christ's love takes in everyone.

"I've seen some of them marry and join churches for the able-bodied."

Both Hill and Ballard hope the Crusader's Chapel concept will catch on elsewhere. Ballard knew of similar chapels in Dallas and Mobile but says he's lost touch with them.

"Some social workers and psychologists might object to a chapel set aside for the handicapped for fear we would draw in and feel sorrier for ourselves," said Ballard.

"But Crusader's Chapel has not been that sort of place. We've had a number of people, newly handicapped, who hadn't adjusted until they came here to worship and were encouraged to learn that life still has a lot to offer.

"We don't attempt to minister to the mentally handicapped, only to those who are handicapped visually and orthopedically. There are probably 20,000 handicapped in Fort Worth, 21 million in this nation.

"How many people on crutches do you see in your able-bodied churches? How many wheel chairs? I've never seen a handicapped person of any kind who couldn't contribute, in some way, to God's work. We have a cerebral palsy victim at the Chapel who can't talk plainly, is spastic, in a wheel chair, but her prayer life is very, very productive and she contributes as a very spiritual person," Ballard said.

"I think a handicapped person attending an able-bodied church might hesitate to teach a Sunday School class, or lead the singing, because there are enough able-bodied people to do it. But at Crusaders Chapel there's nobody else to do it so we all are needed. We all contribute."

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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Court Refuses to Stop  
'Released Time' Program

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By Stan L. Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal of a group of parents from a Virginia town challenging the constitutionality of a "released time" program of religious instruction.

The case, Smith v. Smith, came to the high court from Harrisonburg, Va., a community which since 1923 has permitted pupils in its public schools to receive religious instruction during school hours. Prior to 1963, such instruction was provided in the classroom, but since then a trailer and an abandoned church rectory have been used.

The program involves children in grades 3-6 and is sponsored by the Rockingham Council on Weekday Religious Education. That group is affiliated with the Virginia Council of Churches (VCC).

Under the program, children whose parents have submitted a written consent form are released from regular classroom instruction to attend the religion classes for one hour a week. The trailer, which is owned by the VCC, is parked adjacent to two of the three schools participating in the program. The abandoned rectory used by another school is located directly across the street from the school building.

Children who choose not to participate in the program are not permitted to do regular classroom work while those participating are away at religion classes. Instead, the objecting parents' legal brief stated, they are given "make-work such as washing blackboards."

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Another objection by parents of nonparticipating children was that the curriculum used in the religious instruction is "purely Christian."

The parents' primary legal argument, however, was that the Harrisonburg program violates an earlier Supreme Court decision (*McCollum v. Board of Education*, 1948) which ruled that an Illinois released time program was unconstitutional in that it violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

In 1952, however, the high court ruled in another case (*Zorach v. Clauson*) that a New York released time program did not violate the same constitutional provision.

The difference between the two, according to former Justice William O. Douglas, was that in Illinois the program involved use of the classrooms themselves for religious instruction, while in New York students went to a nearby church building. Douglas wrote the *Zorach* opinion.

Before being appealed to the Supreme Court, the Virginia program had been declared unconstitutional by U. S. District Court Judge James C. Turk. But the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit reversed his decision in August of last year.

The Supreme Court's refusal to grant the case a hearing has the effect of letting stand the court of appeal's ruling and of permitting the Harrisonburg school system to continue its program of religious instruction.

Bicentennial Feature

'Grant Us Liberty,'  
Baptists Tell Mass.

BOSTON, 1774--(BP)--Baptists flatly denied they were disloyal to their country and at the same time charged Massachusetts authorities with denying them the same rights over which colonists were ready to go to war with England.

"Must we be blamed for not laying still," Baptist leader Isaac Backus demanded in a letter to the Massachusetts Congress, "and thus let our countrymen trample upon our rights, and deny us that very liberty that they are ready to take up arms to defend for themselves?"

In threatening to take their plea for religious liberty to the king, Baptists were charged with attempting to advance their cause at the price of the country's welfare. Not only were Baptists accused of pressing "imaginary grievances" at a critical time, but a report circulated that Baptists sent Backus to Philadelphia to attempt to prevent the colonies from uniting to oppose England.

Backus silenced the accusation by telling the Massachusetts assembly, "Baptist churches as heartily unite with their countrymen in this cause as any denomination in the country, and are as ready to exert all their abilities to defend it.

"All America is alarmed by the tea tax," Backus said in his forthright letter, "though, if they please, they can avoid it by not buying the tea; but we have no such liberty. We must either pay the little tax, or else your people appear, even in this time of extremity, determined to lay the great one upon us."

Backus referred to the clergy tax which required that Baptists contribute to the support of state church ministers. Baptists suffered persecution for many years because of the tax and were repeatedly unsuccessful in efforts to have it repealed.

"These lines are written," Backus continued, "to let you know that Baptists will not pay the clergy tax, not only under your principle of taxation without representation but because we dare not render homage to any earthly power which we are convinced belongs only to God."

"If you want to know what we ask of Massachusetts authorities," the Baptist spokesman concluded, "only allow us freely to enjoy the religious liberty that they do in Boston. We ask no more."

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