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**Mt. Olive: A Little
Church with Big Ideas**

By Larry Jerden

CROSSETT, Ark. (BP)--Mt. Olive Baptist Church here is a small-town church with big ideas.

Located in an unincorporated area near an isolated lumber mill town, the church is in the midst of an unprecedented--almost abnormal--boom in every area of its life.

Farrell Morgan, pastor of the church for the past four years, insisted that growth has not come because of any external influence, least of all because of his presence, but because of the desire of the members and their gift for action.

To a city-dweller, the town in the southeastern corner of the state is the picture of isolation. Carved out of the pine forest on which its prosperous economy is based, it is 50 miles to the closest major shopping center, indoor theater, bowling alley or hospital.

Began as a "company town" owned in toto by Crossett Lumber Co., it has remained a one-industry community after the lumber complex was bought and expanded by Georgia-Pacific. Most of Mt. Olive's members are connected--directly or indirectly--to Georgia-Pacific.

Even the isolation from large population centers, while an inconvenience, is not all bad for the church. "There's not a lot to do here," Morgan admitted, "so people really appreciate what the church does. A wedding, a shower or a funeral is a major event. People just respond."

For a "country" church, Mt. Olive seems to offer a lot. Drawing from a population of around 10,000 in both incorporated and unincorporated areas, the average Sunday morning attendance has risen from 254 in 1972 to 432 last December. Some members drive 10 miles through the forest.

The church overcrowds its facilities--running two Sunday Schools and two worship services--and is in the midst of a "Together We Build" fund raising campaign with a \$200,000 goal. The tennis court and softball diamond are landmarks of a vital recreation program.

Besides Morgan, the only paid staff members are Rick Dodd, the music director, and a secretary. Everything is handled through committees--and the committees really work.

There are committees for everything, but almost everyone's favorite is the senior citizens' committee.

"We were in a committee meeting one day," Morgan remembered, "and someone said that we had a ministry for everyone but the senior citizens. 'Pow,' we had volunteers to start one! We limit each committee to six members, and now there is a waiting list to get on that one."

The senior citizens committee plans monthly outings for the retired group, with attendance around 50 or 60 each month. It affects lives. One lady, promoted into the senior adult Sunday School class, said, "I'm just sittin' here waiting to die." After the senior ministry got going, she said, "I'm ready to live."

At the other end of the age spectrum is the children's ministry and an integral part of it is the bus ministry.

"We got into the bus ministry because some of our laymen felt called to it," Morgan said. "All our workers are called--and that's not just a word. They can give you an experience about it."

"The first man called into the bus ministry loves bird hunting more than anything. He hunted every Saturday. Now he spends his Saturdays visiting the children on his route. If you really want to get an idea of what makes this church go, you need to be here on Saturday and feel the excitement when the bus ministry people go out."

Some 40 or 50 members involved in the bus ministry, and they all visit every Saturday. The buses brought in 172 children one Sunday. But the depth of the ministry goes much deeper.

"The kids who ride the bus are different from most of our members," the pastor explained. "Some of them have never been to church before. They come to love the bus workers like part of their family. When there is grief or a problem, they call their bus worker, not me."

The deacons also are part of the spiritual ministry. "We have deacons assigned to families Morgan explained, "and they perform a spiritual ministry. They visit the sick, in the hospitals, and with the bereaved at death. In fact, when I go to a home to visit in some cases, the deacon often beats me there."

And for youth there are monthly social events, as well as ball teams and other recreation.

Mt. Olive's emphasis is on outreach, soul-winning, and "basic" church building.

"Why are we growing?" he pondered. "I understand several churches in this type situation are growing because they are getting back to fundamentals of what makes churches grow. Some of the basic approaches we used successfully in the 1950s will work now if people will really apply them."

"We are conservative, some would say ultra-conservative, doctrinally, and people are hungry for that. They will come to hear that type preaching. We keep soul-winning central," he added. "If a program doesn't have winning souls as its ultimate purpose, then it ought to be dropped."

With that evangelistic emphasis, Mt. Olive had 101 baptisms last year, a year that also saw the continuation of a growing missions emphasis.

"We have the usual missions emphasis," Morgan said, "with Brotherhood and Woman's Missionary Union. But more than that, we are increasing our gifts to missions every year. We've raised our gifts to the Cooperative Program (Southern Baptist unified budget) one percent each year to 17 percent, and we promote the special missions offerings."

In one testimony meeting, a layman declared that "every year we increase our Cooperative Program percentage, God just raises our income to pay for it."

"You could just hear the amens," the pastor related.

The church's budget has jumped from a little over \$44,000 four years ago to gifts of \$125,000 last year, but in terms of value received, it appears the church income would have to be greater.

"One example of that is our tennis court," Morgan explained. "One member gave the sand, another the pipe, another the chain link, and another the wire. Some of the laymen raised money for the concrete, so we only spent about \$2,000 for a \$9,000 tennis court."

"We've bought land for more recreation room, and whenever we want to clear it, one of our members will drop a 'Cat' in here. If another member can clear it that day, fine. If not, the guy who dropped it will come in and clear it after he gets off work."

Mt. Olive, despite its successes, is not a pastoral heaven with no problems. "We have all the problems you have in a big city," one member said. "They are just on a smaller scale. There's dope sold among the youth, children born out of wedlock, corruption and a small-town kind of violence."

Crossett, Ark., like other rural areas, is not an escape from the world where every morning begins with a TV-commercial country breakfast. But it gets the job done.



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Committee Urges Evangelism To Halt Methodist Decline

NASHVILLE (BP)--A 10-person United Methodist committee, concerned over steadily decreasing membership, voted here to ask the denomination's General Council on Ministries to recommend evangelism as a denominational priority during the next quadrennium, along with world hunger and ethnic minorities in local churches.

The committee said a drop in financial support for evangelism and education programs within the United Methodist Church has been a major reason why the denomination has lost more than a million members in the past decade.

"We think the people in the local churches are calling for a greater emphasis on evangelism, and we think they would be willing to support such an emphasis," said Edward L. Duncan, chairman of the executive committee of the division of evangelism, worship and stewardship of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship.

The committee, which examined the initial draft of an extensive membership study, said both evangelism and the church school (Sunday School) have repeatedly surfaced in recent months as areas in which membership loss trends must be reversed. "We're not losing members," said Warren Hartman of the Board of Discipleship's division of education. "We're just not getting new ones."

Combined membership in the now-merged Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist Churches stood at an all-time high of 11,054,634 in 1964, he said, but there has been a net loss each year since that time. At the close of 1974, membership was 9,957,710--a net loss of slightly more than a million members in the past decade.

The total number of congregations has decreased from 43,116 in 1964 to 39,195 in 1974.

A major portion of the net loss may be attributed to a sharp decrease in the number of persons added through "profession of faith" (new Christians), Hartman explained.

The number of persons removed from church rolls has remained relatively constant for the four quadrennia between 1957 and 1972, he said, representing a range of 645,000 and 677,000, he said.

Contrary to popular opinion, Hartman said, statistics show there has been no appreciable change in the rate that persons have transferred to other denominations. In fact, there has been a slight tendency to receive about 10 percent more from other denominations than to transfer out to other denominations, he said.

The peak quadrennium for receiving persons on profession of faith was 1975-60, when more than 400,000 new persons were added each year. The lowest number was received during the 1969-72 quadrennium, when slightly more than 210,000 were added each year by profession of faith.

The executive committee members expressed shock when Hartman reported that during 1973, 38.3 percent of all United Methodist congregations did not receive anyone by profession of faith, and that 65.8 percent had received four persons or fewer. (Those percentages overlap.)

The number of professions of faith is in an inverse ratio to the size of the church, Hartman explained. The smaller the church, the larger number of professions of faith per 1,000 members.

In summary, Hartman said the developments which have resulted in a net decline in church membership must be located in two procedures: a slight increase in removals from church rolls and a sharp reduction in additions by profession of faith.

Hartman suggested, and the committee members readily agreed, that there is "probably a relationship" between shifts in denominational financial support and program emphases and the decline in church membership.

While the average increase of giving to all causes has increased 269.39 percent since 1949, Hartman said money from general causes allocated to agencies responsible for evangelism and Christian education in local churches increased 109.40 percent.

Percentage of money for all causes which has been allocated to evangelism and Christian education has dropped from 5.08 percent in the 1949-52 quadrennium to 2.88 percent in the present quadrennium. "This means the percentage of the general church dollar which has been invested in evangelism and Christian education has been reduced by almost one-half, or 43.3 percent between 1949 and 1975," he said.

Hartman also noted a program shift in evangelism and education away from broadly defined programs appealing to large numbers of persons to more sharply defined programs and resources with a focus on highly specialized leadership skills and a more limited audience.

Hartman believes church schools in United Methodist churches will be the most reliable single factor for predicting future trends and developments in the life of the church because it is through that avenue that the church is receiving its largest numbers by profession of faith.

He also pointed to the decrease in the number of new congregations. While there were 68 new churches organized between 1970 and 1974, he said 1,697 churches were either discontinued or merged.

"The loss of these congregations has undoubtedly contributed to the net decline in church membership since it is highly unlikely that all the members of those churches transferred their membership to another United Methodist Church," he said.

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National Colloquium Will
Explore Christian Education

Baptist Press
2/9/76

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--A battery of prominent educators and denominational leaders will address themselves to the challenges of Christian education in America's third century at a National Colloquium on Christian Education here, June 9-12.

The colloquium is sponsored by the Education Commission of 12.6-million-member Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, made up of 71 Baptist colleges, schools and seminaries from California to Virginia.

Addressing itself to the theme, "Looking to the Third Century with Confidence," the colloquium will introduce a three year study of Baptist education. That study will feature workshops, seminars and regional meetings for pastors, administrators, faculty members, and denominational leaders throughout the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Participants at the four-day gathering, which meets prior to the SBC annual meeting in Norfolk, June 15-17, will deal with at least seven major issues. They are understanding the purpose of a Baptist school, educating to maintain a Christian witness in a secular culture, developing Christian citizenship, mutual support of educational institution and denomination, how Baptist schools are developing Christian leadership, financial necessities of education, and maintaining and developing responsible trusteeship.

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Program personnel include 12 college presidents; James Landes, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, and former college president; Robert Gale, president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington; Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church, Houston; Carolyn Weatherford, executive director, Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham.

Also, Baker J. Cauthen, executive secretary, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Va.; Arthur B. Rutledge, executive director, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Atlanta; David L. Boren, governor of Oklahoma and former college professor; Porter Routh, executive secretary-treasurer, SBC Executive Committee, Nashville.

Also, Earl McGrath, senior educational advisor, Lilly Foundation, Indianapolis; Fred E. Harris, associate general secretary, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Nashville; John Newport, professor of philosophy of religion, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; and Jean Hendricks, dean, Mercer University at Atlanta.

The college and university presidents are Abner V. McCall, Baylor, Waco, Tex.; Daniel R. Grant, Ouachita Baptist, Arkadelphia, Ark.; E. Bruce Heilman, University of Richmond (Va.); John E. Johns, Stetson, DeLand, Fla.; Robert L. Lynn, Louisiana College, Pineville, La.; W. Lewis Nobles, Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss.; James Ralph Scales, Wake Forest, Winston-Salem, N. C.; William K. Weaver Jr., Mobile College, Mobile, Ala.; John E. Weems, Meredith, Raleigh, N. C.; William G. Tanner, Oklahoma Baptist, Shawnee, Okla.; John A. Fincher, Carson-Newman, Jefferson City, Tenn.; and Daniel Tse, Hong Baptist College.

Tanner is also chairman of the Education Commission and Fincher is also president of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools.

"During the Bicentennial year, it is highly appropriate to call attention to the contribution of Baptist educational institutions, which have given so much to the development of Southern Baptists and to the advancement of general education in our society," says Ben C. Fisher, the Education Commission's executive director-treasurer.

Fisher said the colloquium will deal with the responsibility of schools to transmit values and will reaffirm fundamental Biblical and theological presuppositions, seek to re-examine the role of Christianity and Christian education in secular culture, and articulate the relationship of Baptist education to the local church.

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BWA Gives Aid to
Guatemala 'Quake Victims

Baptist Press
2/9/76

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) is transmitting \$12,000 in cash to Guatemalan Baptist for use in relieving suffering from the disastrous earthquake on February 4.

Appeals have gone out from the BWA for additional funds to be channeled to the victims in the Central American country. Carl W. Tiller, BWA relief co-ordinator said that \$2,000 in instant response was drawn from emergency funds on the day of the earthquake. This sum consists of contributions from BWA member convention individuals and churches for immediate use in a disaster.

Contributions of \$5,000 each from the Baptist Federation of Canada and the American Baptist Churches of the USA have been received and forwarded to the Baptist Convention of Guatemala, a BWA affiliate in focus of relief efforts from Baptists of the world.

Another BWA member, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Foreign Mission Board, has 16 missionaries in Guatemala and are sending aid directly through their mission. The board approved today to send \$25,000 for relief. Assistance also is being given by the Brothers Brother Foundation, an interfaith medical group headed by Dr. Robert A. Hingson, a Baptist deacon of Pittsburg, Pa. Hingson has volunteered to serve as a courier in transmitting funds to Guatemala.

Contributions to Guatemallians are for purchasing food, medicine and shelter for victims. Money may be sent to the Baptist World Alliance, 1628 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Representative of the SBC Foreign Mission Board reports that missionaries in Guatemala City indicate that at least 15 Baptists have been killed, many Baptist families are homeless, 3 Baptist churches in Guatemala City heavily damaged. No report yet on rural areas.

BWA statistics list 5,836 Baptist people and 83 Baptist churches in Guatemala.

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Beirut Missionaries See
Hope in New Cease-Fire

By Ruth Fowler

BEIRUT, Lebanon--Cities are seldom silent, but Beirut is quieter now than it has been in many months. The shooting has stopped. Apparently, the cease-fire is holding.

In the midst of the battle or the mourning, some Southern Baptist missionaries have remained in their place of service beside Lebanese friends. Others have left because their work was hopelessly interrupted, their children's educational needs required a move, or for other equally valid reasons. All decisions were individual and personal and fully backed by the Foreign Mission Board.

Among the missionaries who remained were James K. Ragland, Director of Beirut Baptist School; Finlay M. Graham, President of Arab Baptist Seminary; and David W. King, seminary teacher. Each man has sent cassette tapes sharing their feelings about the conflict and the continuing role of missionaries and Lebanese Baptists.

"When the fighting increased we realized a decision had to be made," Graham said. "We had students enrolled at the seminary. It was possible to carry on our work. We decided to stay."

"It's my job to be in Lebanon," Ragland said. "I needed to get the school open if at all possible. It seems to me a missionary is called not only to share the hours of calm and peace with those God has called him to live with, but also called to share their hard times, their sorrows and their dangers. As the director of the Beirut Baptist School and acting station treasurer, I also had a moral responsibility to be here to pay employees who depend on the school for their livelihood. I felt I ought to come back to continue the witness that I tried to convey here in this country."

"We stayed to share perilous times with Christians and non-Christian friends," said King. "To show them the sufficiency of Christ. Some people think because we have children we should leave, but there are many people here who have children who cannot leave."

The Beirut Baptist School was able to open for one month of its three-month term. The publication and radio ministries in Lebanon continued when possible though both were severely hampered. The seminary did not miss a day of class, but some students were stranded for different intervals by fighting at their homes.

The missionaries' stay was not without fear. Fear of what might happen in the fighting and fear of the consequences when control of an area changed hands.

Ragland was alone in his home. "There were tense moments for me, but I received comfort and assurance from the Lord. My fear and my anxiety soon gave way to a sense of peace and Christ's presence."

The presence of the missionaries in Beirut makes a difference as they witness to the people, according to Ragland.

"This is a time when missionaries can be interpreters of what's going on in the country," Ragland continued. "We've tried during these days of tension and sorrow to be a comfort to our Baptists, our friends. We've tried to keep in contact with national pastors here. It's been a time of witness. When death is real and near and when the world is falling to pieces it seems, we can go to them in service, pointing out to them that Christ's kingdom is everlasting. Christ in peoples hearts can be the beginning of a new Lebanon."

The missionaries feel they have a definite and significant role in the future of Lebanon.

"Whatever the outcome of the conflict," said Graham, "we know this, Lebanon needs a clear, firm gospel witness as never before. The people of Lebanon no matter what their religious background really need Christ. We can encourage the members of our churches to regain enthusiasm and zeal for preaching the Gospel."

"It will be necessary to help churches repair damages and provide funds for struggling churches whose members have been scattered," Graham continued. "Our spiritual contribution will be the greatest contribution we can make, not to discourage or belittle the opportunity for physical service. Above all our presence here, shoulder to shoulder, with our National Lebanese Baptists will mean more than anything else to help bring order out of chaos."

Ragland feels the Beirut Baptist School will be a major part of the rebuilding efforts.

"As we meet these children day-by-day, and their parents, we encourage them to work together and love each other--and really it doesn't take a lot of encouragement."

The school is divided fifty-fifty between Muslim and Christian, the two factions fighting in the Civil War, yet, Ragland remembers seeing four students of all faiths hugging each other in the hall in an expression of mutual love.

The largest Baptist churches in Beirut are distributed throughout the city, with two on the western, Muslim, side of the city and two on the eastern, Christian side. Missionaries have remained politically neutral. All fighting factions have assured Ragland they would not attack the school.

"I think the conflict has made the Baptists here more aware of their responsibility. They see there is no room for postponing basic ministries. The night came much quicker than Lebanese Baptists or missionaries had realized. If the Lord does give us another chance, and I believe He will, we're going to find a more determined group of Baptists in Lebanon. They will be more determined to witness, more determined to put first things first, more determined to make Christ known to all people."

Ragland called the war the night, perhaps the time has come that the silent guns can be called the day.