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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Smokey Packs 'Em in at
Trailer Park Services

By Everett Hullum
Adapted for Baptist Press

Sunday mornings, residents of the Fun N Sun Too trailer park in Harlingen, Tex., carry lawn chairs and camp stools to a large recreation hall.

Inside the hall, they form row after row around the platform and wait for "the preacher" to arrive. The standing joke is that every chair is full each Sunday, because "everyone brings his own chair."

But it is no joking matter. On a record Sunday this winter, 2,600 "winter Texans" attended worship services in the flag-draped hall.

"The preacher" who started it is not a pastor, but a layman who feels that his special "ministry" is reaching the thousands of "winter Texans" who come to the Rio Grande Valley area each winter to escape cold weather to the North.

C.L. "Smokey" Boyle, a past vice president and secretary for Texas Baptist Men, earns his living as vice president of a chain of autoparts stores, but his life is devoted mostly to sharing the gospel with everyone he meets.

His ministry to "winter Texans" started in about 1969 when Boyle began swapping fish stories and Texas jokes with men in some of the trailer parks that had begun to spring up in the Rio Grand Valley.

Eventually, he started Sunday worship services at one of the parks. Twice, walls had to be knocked out of the meeting place to allow for larger crowds attending his services.

When he made personal contacts with people, he passed out a calling card printed, "I LIKE WINTER TEXANS." The phrase stuck. Boyle was asked to head the Chamber of Commerce's "winter Texas" committee.

It hasn't always been that way. Some South Texans have resented the "rich Yankees" who follow the geese South each winter, packing their swimsuits and fishing gear into their trailers, mobile homes and campers. Some call them "snowbirds" in a not-too-favorable tone.

But gradually, attitudes have been changing and the term "snowbird" has given way to "winter Texan." One thing that has changed attitudes is the economics of the situation.

Between 1968 and 1974, tourism in the valley leaped from 448,000 to 1,426,050. And valley residents began calculating income from tourists. Last year, the winter tourists poured an estimated \$126 million into Texas.

Suddenly, many South Texans became believers. Billboards leading into the valley bear large, smiling citrus faces and the message, "Welcome Home, Winter Texan. Valley Folks Are Glad You're Here."

Some citrus growers have torn out every other row of their orchards to accommodate the visitor's trailers. Airstreams and Winnebagos now nest in what's left of the grapefruit and orange-laden groves.

"It's more profitable to rent trailer spaces than it is to raise oranges," reasoned one Texan. Although profits and economics may have motivated some South Texans, Boyle and others are driven by a much stronger motivation to make believers (in Christ) out of the "winter Texans."

Boyle maintains an interdenominational identity and keeps his day-to-day ministry low-key. "Most park owners don't want their people bothered," he explained. "They won't even allow Girl Scouts to sell cookies."

Although some park operators are afraid to have a worship service on Sunday, Hank Stanley, owner of the Fun N Sun Too, said Boyle's ministry is a boon to his business.

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The park provides shuffleboard, square dances, ice cream socials and a variety of other activities, but Stanley and his wife insist the Sunday worship services are the best attended.

Some people come, year after year, to the park because of Boyle's ministry, Stanley said. "This has weeded out some of the rougher elements. He's done a tremendous amount of good."

During one service this winter at the Fun N Sun Too Park, worship began with a husband-wife team singing a syncopated tune, "Thanks a Million, Lord." Several songs later, Boyle arrived after conducting a worship service at another park.

He read a humorous poem, a passage from the Bible and delivered an evangelistic message. His presentation was sparked with drama, jokes and stories. But he departed from the usual evangelistic format in two ways. He did not collect an offering, nor did he give an invitation.

"I don't care about a dime," he insisted, concerning the lack of an offering during the service.

Instead of the traditional invitation, he told the people present to "go back to your railers or just out there in the palm trees or anywhere" for conversation and personal encounter with God.

Boyle's ministry also involves a hospital ministry. Medical care is a major problem among the older, retired persons who come to South Texas for the winter. Thus Boyle seeks to help these people with their medical problems.

One man who suffered heart trouble and was hospitalized said that at a time when he needed help, "Smokey was there, and he stayed there." The man, an Episcopalian, said he had been drifting away from his church and from God until he met Smokey.

"I didn't go to church to find out what's wrong with the United Nations," the man insisted. "Smokey preaches straight from the Book, and helps you know how to live!"

Observing Boyle's work and believing that Baptists should broaden their work among the aging Robert E. Smith, director of missions for the Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, is ramrodding a program aimed at "winter Texans."

Eventually, he hopes to attract about a dozen retired pastors with travel trailers into the valley for a period of four to six months. Texas Baptists will provide \$75 a month for trailer space in a park.

The approach, Smith explained, "is to let the man go in as a winter Texan. He's anonymous. He's not there as a Baptist, but as a Christian concerned about others."

Each pastor would make contacts through available programs within the park. Local churches would provide Vacation Bible Schools, using their own senior citizens in activities.

After the church has established rapport, it would seek to maintain an effective ministry for the remainder of the "winter Texan's" visit, Smith said.

As the "winter Texans" return to their home churches in the North, frequently they become more active there.

"In the long haul," Smith said, "It can make the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's northern work easier," as the "winter Texans" will be more familiar with the denomination. (BP)

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Adapted from the April 1976 issue of World Mission Journal.

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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'Missionary Movement Helps

Liberate Woman': Historian

WAKE FOREST (BP)--The modern missionary movement has actually contributed to liberating women to assume their rightful place among church leaders, a woman church historian said here.

After the Protestant Reformation "removed all traditional places for women to have a religious vocation," except one--that of a minister's wife--"it came to be acceptable for a woman to be a missionary," said Catherine (Mrs. Justo) Gonzalez in a joint address with her husband at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

As women missionaries wrote or came home telling of the many leadership positions they filled overseas, it made an impact on women at home, said Mrs. Gonzalez, an associate professor of church history at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga.

So, she concluded, "The present desire for change can be traced to the woman missionary."

Her husband, Justo Gonzalez, agreed with her analysis and noted that in his native Cuba, women have long served churches in leadership roles, including pastorates. Gonzalez is associate professor of world Christianity and historical theology at Emory University in Atlanta.

The couple discussed other major historical stances in which, they said, God has spoken through the missionary situation to communicate important truths. The first involved the "great struggle of opening the church to Gentiles." Another concerned the "slave and free"--specifically the younger Third World churches, "which are coming into their own," and the older missionary churches.



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Back-Yard Baptisms Take God 'Where the People Are'

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (BP)--Christian laymen are baptizing new converts in back-yard swimming pools in this city known for its tourists and millionaires.

The swimming pool baptisms, called "Operation Phillip", are part of an expanded evangelistic program developed by the First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, under the leadership of Jess Moody, the pastor.

"Ordained church staff members still baptize every Sunday night in the church's baptistry," Moody told Baptist Press. "The 'Operation Phillip' effort is a way of dramatizing the fact that God doesn't live in a box called the church, but he is out where the people are."

Moody said baptisms by laymen are "a rarity among present-day Southern Baptists, although they were common in the New Testament, and it has been common in Baptist history for churches to designate laymen to baptize for the pastor. We're acting like (the biblical book of) Acts," Moody said of "Operation Phillip."

The baptisms are taking place in the back-yards of "Life Centers"--- homes of members where neighbors and friends gather for fellowship, prayer and Bible study.

The "Life Centers" have to be located near a swimming pool or other body of clean water so those who request it can be baptized into membership of the church on the spot, according to Moody.

By taking the church back into the community, Moody and the church's minister of evangelism, Barry Schahn, are hoping to double the church's membership to 10,000 in five years.

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Seminar Features Nine
Senators and Representatives

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Nine U. S. Senators and Representatives are among politicians, educators and religious leaders who have accepted invitations to address a national seminar on Christian Citizenship '76, sponsored here March 22-24 by the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission.

President Gerald R. Ford also has been invited but has not yet been able to confirm whether his schedule will permit him to speak, a Christian Life Commission spokesman said.

Senators at the annual seminar at the Statler Hilton Hotel include Edward Kennedy (D.-Mass.), speaking on "National Health Security--A National Priority;" George McGovern (D.-S.D.), "With Liberty and Justice for All;" Howard Baker (R.-Tenn.), "Elections '76: A Republican Perspective;" John Tower (R.-Tex.), "Conscience of a Conservative;" and Mark Hatfield (R.-Ore.), "Christian Citizens Confronting Civil Religion."

U. S. Representatives include Barbara Jordan (D.-Tex.), "Elections '76: A Democratic Perspective;" Les Aspin (D.-Wisc.), "The Price of Peace;" Andrew Young (D.-Ga.), also an ordained United Church of Christ minister, "The Black Experience;" and John Anderson (R.-Ill.) "Christian Conscience and Political Decisions."

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Other program personnel include Harvey Cox, professor, Harvard University Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass., "Continuing the Revolution;" Leonard Woodcock, president, United Auto Workers International, Detroit, "Recovering Economic Integrity;" J. Irwin Miller, president, Cummins Engine Co., Columbus, Ind., "Christian Morals and Economic Policies;" James Armstrong, United Methodist bishop, Aberdeen, S. D., "The Nation Yet to Be: Christian Mission and the New Patriotism;"

Also, Nolan Estes, superintendent, Dallas Independent School District and Baptist deacon, "Christian Citizenship and the Crisis in Public Education; L. D. Johnson, chaplain, Furman University, Greenville, S. C., "Christian Citizenship '76;" and William E. Hull, pastor, First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., who will interpret the seminar theme.

Foy Valentine of Nashville, Christian Life Commission executive secretary, commenting on the seminar theme, noted: "Just before the immensely important national elections and at the historic juncture when the nation is beginning its third century, this seminar will consider the great moral issues immediately before us and how the people of God can best confront them." Some 750 Southern Baptists are expected to attend.

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Mercer In Atlanta Plans
Summer Session in Europe

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ATLANTA (BP)--Mercer University in Atlanta has announced plans for a summer session at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, a suburb of Zurich.

We want students to learn more about the world they live in, and one sure way to learn is by traveling in a foreign country," said James C. Bryant, director of the overseas study and humanities division chairman for the Baptist school.

Courses will be offered in English, history, religion, philosophy, art and drama, and students will make excursions to major European cities on weekends during a summer session, June 5 to July 17.

The seminary, which has no summer school, hopes to make the study abroad program a regular feature, according to seminary president, C. Penrose St. Amant.

Bryant said students can get 10 hours of college credit, round trip fare, room rent in seminary dorms, and three meals a day for \$1,575. He said a few special students and others who wish to take courses on a non-credit basis also will be accepted.

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Urge Christians To Walk
For Sanctity Of Sabbath

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ATLANTA (BP)--Christians of America have been challenged to make a "Symbolic Statement for 1976" in defense of the sanctity of the Sabbath.

The challenge came from the executive board of the Lord's Day Alliance of the USA, meeting in semi-annual session in Atlanta.

The alliance asked Christians to park their cars and walk to church on four Sundays in 1976, Feb. 29, May 30, Aug. 29 and Oct. 31. These are the fifth Sundays in five-Sunday months.

James P. Wesberry of Atlanta, executive secretary of the Lord's Day Alliance, said "This would demonstrate our concern for environmental and energy needs, express love for our neighbors and mark Sunday as a day of worship."

Wesberry said 50 families in New England have already pledged to hold a "Sunday Neighborhood Walk" on Feb. 29.

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