

**FEATURES**  
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76-68

Couple Plants Church  
In Old Milwaukee

By Walker Knight

MILWAUKEE, (BP)-- Center Baptist Church sits on the rim of Milwaukee's inner city, between a multi-storied new hospital and aging, sagging houses.

Unlike many Southern Baptist churches, it is in a string of storefront buildings and probably never will be self-supporting.

The center began as one of Lakeland Baptist Association's ministries to the central city. Student summer missionaries organized a core group through Vacation Bible School, and then a US-2 missionary directed projects--such as a coffeehouse--in a rented empty store.

Mike and Virgie Brown, church extension appointees of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB), Lakeland Association and the sponsoring Baptist General Convention of Texas, came here in 1972 and helped the center formally organize as a church.

Now the church has expanded into three buildings. Ping pong tables, book racks, table and chairs, and a grey auditorium with folding chairs fill the long rooms. Despite its location in a high risk area plagued by vandalism, Center Church is slowly growing, drawing an assortment of persons from its multi-ethnic neighborhood.

"We're more like heaven than most churches because we have a few of everybody," Virgie says. "We have many that don't fit in anywhere else, but here they all fit together. It's amazing how they accept each other."

One frustration to growth is the transient lifestyle of most residents--housing, jobs, and relationships are constantly shifting.

"We hope that the church can provide a stimulating force in their lives," Mike says. "Some drift in and out, three months here and three months in Chicago, then to Miami, By the time we get their addresses, they've moved."

The mobile congregation also affects the church's financial independence. One-eighth of Southern Baptist church pastoral aid funds for Minnesota and Wisconsin support Center Church and the Browns' work. The HMB's usual policy is to phase out support over a period of years, but because of the church's unique ministry in the central city, exceptions are made.

The Browns emphasize ministry to the whole person, meeting physical and spiritual needs. Part of that philosophy shows in their approach to training. Already stretched too thin by time demands they seek to increase each church members' self esteem by helping them to become more effective, skillful contributors to the church program.

For younger persons, the Browns offer friendship, counseling and plan activities that will help youths escape the sluggish environment.

On a typical day, Mike drives a group of boys and girls from the center to a suburban church for a morning softball game. After a close score, he gathers the youngsters under a tree for refreshments and a short devotional, comparing life to a ball game.

That afternoon he takes another group for a "weeding" session in the church's garden plot at the county farm. "The garden project has been good for the children," Mike says. "They had never planted seeds and watched them grow. Virgie has helped them cook and prepare food for storage."

Mike and Virgie have opened their home to the church's members, cultivating relationships that some have never had before.

"This has not been as profound a thing with the white members as with the black. One couple said we were the only white people they had been friends with," Virgie says.

The Browns' concern for people has been a trademark of their ministry since the days they were college Baptist Student Union (BSU) workers in Cherokee, N.C., summer missionaries in New Mexico, and US-2ers in Kobuk, Alaska. After seminary and work with the inner city Forest Avenue Baptist Church in Kansas City, the couple felt that Milwaukee was the place God wanted them.

Both say they have fulfillment in their work with Center Baptist Church—Mike finds his most time-consuming ministry is counseling adults and children. Many days he devotes an entire morning at the courthouse helping iron out a problem with the police.

He blames a lot of the tension with juveniles on their home situations. Seeing two teenagers being questioned by police on the street, Mike explains their family life: "I wouldn't call it a home...That's what hurts..."

Billy is an example of Mike's counseling results. One of three sons raised by a divorced mother, sensitive and withdrawn Billy couldn't cope with his emotional problems and twice attempted suicide. Through ups and downs, Mike led Billy to a commitment to Christ. Now the boy shares his experiences with other persons in crisis through a telephone ministry.

The Browns, among missionaries featured in "Seven Beginnings," a new photo-textbook for the Home Mission Board, SBC, are sensitive to people in need and feel strongly that the Holy Spirit directs them in reaching out.

"When you go to a house and someone comes to the door to say, 'Come in, I've been expecting you,' then you realize something other than your own power is manifesting itself," Mike notes.

Mike dreams of a better church building with a gym, offices, teaching space, Sunday School rooms and kitchen facilities.

"It may take a few years, but it can happen," Virgie says.

Meanwhile, the daily concern for blacks, whites, Spanish-speaking, the young, the elderly, and the troubled continue in Milwaukee's inner city.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers on 4/15/76

# # #

SBC Churches Start 679  
New Training Programs

Baptist Press  
4/19/76

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist churches across the country reported 679 new church training programs established in an emphasis ending the first Sunday in April, which was designated "New Day for Training."

Some programs included among the 679 churches reporting were begun prior to April, with all new programs started since October, 1975. Attendance in the new programs on April 4, totaled 25,611, for an average of 37.8 new members in each new group (churchwide), according to Philip B. Harris, church training department secretary for the Baptist Sunday School Board here.

The 679 total represents the largest number of churches beginning new training programs in recent history, said Harris. Each local association in the denomination was encouraged to establish at least one new church training program by April 4. The overall goal was 1,196, he said.

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#### CORRECTION

In the BP story of 4/14/76 headlined, "John W. McCall, Prominent Baptist Dies in Nairobi," first lines of grafs 6 and 7, the proper spelling is "Lizette," in both instances (vice Mizette). Thanks --Baptist Press

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# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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April 19, 1976

Richardson Named Associate  
On N. C. Biblical Recorder

76-68

RALEIGH, N. C. (BP)--Charles R. Richardson, assistant editor of the Baptist Standard in Dallas, will accept a similar position with the Biblical Recorder, state news publication for North Carolina Southern Baptists, effective June 15.

Richardson, 40, an 18-year veteran of journalism and public relations, fills a position vacated in Nov. 1973 by Toby Druin, according to Marse Grant, editor of the Biblical Recorder.

A native Texan, Richardson was public information director at Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Tex., on two different occasions, 1965-67 and 1968-73. He joined the staff of the Standard, state newspaper for Texas Baptists, in July, 1973.

Other denominational positions have included serving as news director at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif., 1961-62, and press representative for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1967-68.

Richardson was also an information specialist in the U. S. Army in Korea and Japan, 1958-60, writing for Army newspapers. That included one year as a unit news editor at Pacific Stars and Stripes.

After that he joined the Abilene Reporter News, where he served as staff writer, religion editor, state editor and then Sunday editor.

Richardson was graduated from Howard Payne College, Brownwood, Tex., in 1958, with a degree in journalism, history and education. He served during college days as a reporter for the Brownwood Bulletin and city editor of the Brown County Gazette, Bangs, Tex.

He also holds a master's degree in history and secondary education from Hardin-Simmons University, and is completing requirements for a master's degree in journalism from East Texas State University, Commerce. He has studied at Golden Gate Seminary and holds a diploma from the Famous Writers School, Westport, Conn.

Richardson has earned accredited status in the Public Relations Society of America and has served as director and officer of a number of religious, civic and professional organizations.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state editors.

# # # #

Ford Invitation Stands;  
Editor Will Not Pursue

Baptist Press  
4/19/76

NASHVILLE (BP)--An invitation to President Gerald R. Ford to address the annual Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Norfolk, Va., June 15, will not be withdrawn and a Baptist newspaper editor who called for withdrawing the offer for Ford to speak to the SBC has said he will not pursue the matter further.

The committee's decision to reaffirm the Ford invitation came in response to a widely-circulated Mailgram from Robert J. Hastings, editor of the Illinois Baptist to R. G. Puckett, chairman of the Committee on Order of Business, SBC, and editor of the Maryland Baptist.

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Hastings had protested the invitation, contending it was unfair to other presidential candidates, Bicentennial or not, particularly to Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist layman.

The SBC committee's decision was made via a telephone conference involving all but one member, Harley G. Humes, who could not be reached, according to Puckett, who released a statement on the committee's behalf to Baptist Press. All committee members contacted agreed to reaffirm the invitation for the President to address the SBC, Puckett said.

Hastings, on learning of the committee's decision responded:

"I appreciate the prompt response from the Committee on Order of Business. It shows they are responsive to opinion."

Secondly, he said, "The use of the word 'embarrassing' on my part was ill-chosen, and, actually, we have no reason to be embarrassed if the President does accept the invitation."

Hastings had written to Puckett that, "We are in the embarrassing position of giving Ford this political platform in an election year . . ."

The Illinois editor further responded, "In view of the committee's almost unanimous decision, I respect their judgment and plan no further action." His decision, Hastings said, meant he was also abandoning earlier plans for a motion to be made at the SBC calling for withdrawal of the invitation to Ford.

Puckett, speaking for the SBC committee, stated the group's reasons for reaffirming its invitation to the President:

"The invitation was extended as part of the Convention's celebration of the nation's Bicentennial. The program of the annual meeting of the SBC is not a platform for political candidates. The Convention has a long-standing practice of non-endorsement of any candidate for any office. Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter are no exception.

"The protest of the invitation to Mr. Ford had not been directed toward the President but rather the Committee on Order of Business for extending the invitation . . . The Committee . . . regrets any confusion or misunderstanding resulting from the invitation to President Ford.

"However, the committee reaffirms the propriety of the invitation from the nation's largest evangelical body to the President . . . during the Bicentennial year.

"The Committee . . . also regrets the injection of partisan politics into the situation by Editor Hastings. Such was never intended by the Committee," which "clearly separated the office of President from the candidacy of Gerald R. Ford. The invitation was based on the former without any endorsement of the latter."

The Committee's statement cited that the "invitation was personally presented to President Ford through mediators in Washington at the request of SBC President Jaroy Weber" of Lubbock, Tex., ex-officio member of the committee.

The invitation "was not rejected at the time extended and is subject to confirmation or decline two or three weeks before the June 15 date of the (Ford's) address. All press releases have clearly stated the acceptance (by Ford) was tentative, subject to the President's schedule and national priorities at the time. An earlier check with the White House scheduling office, had confirmed the tentative nature of acceptance by the President, as cited by the SBC committee.

Hastings said that the Illinois Baptist State Association's (IBSA) "Freedom in Christ Bicentennial Rally," planned for July 4 called initially for inviting Jimmy Carter to speak, but the "invitation was not extended because of Carter's (presidential) candidacy."