



August 5, 1976  
"No Excuse Sunday"  
Brought 'Em Back

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By Shaw McCutcheon

FULTON, Ky. (BP)--David Clapp, the new young minister of the First Baptist Church here, was tired of hearing excuses about why his parishioners weren't coming to church on Sundays.

Attendance was down, and he needed something to bolster the normally slack summer season.

So one Sunday he and a church committee held the church's first "No Excuse Sunday" to kick off a 10-week contest designed to bolster attendance.

Those who had complained of spring fever were given a selection of tiny trees and flowers upon arrival.

Eyedrops were handed out for those who said they stayed up too late on Saturday, and a television was there for those who didn't want to miss their favorite program.

Cots were provided for those who said Sunday was their only chance to sleep late. One man, taking Clapp at his word, spread one out in an aisle and "slept" through the whole service.

Blankets were provided for those who said the church was too cold, and fans were supplied to those who said it was too hot.

Dozens of TV dinners were supplied to those who complained they couldn't go to church and cook the same day.

And for the ultimate excuse--that the roof might cave in if they ever went to church--steel helmets were handed out at the door.

That Sunday, Clapp said, attendance nearly doubled to about 600--a record--and since then the average has been about 100 more than the normal 300 or so.

"Attendance has been higher now than in the past six or seven years," he said, obviously pleased.

But he said he probably wouldn't try it again because the impact wouldn't be the same.

"If you feed ice cream by the barrel, you get sick of it."

But he added, "People love it. It's a real joke, and it's an opportunity for us to laugh at ourselves."

The contest which began with "No Excuse Sunday" is relatively simple. The church's Sunday school classes were divided into teams, the Reds and the Blues.

Each team scores a certain number of points for bringing in delinquent members or new visitors. The team with the most points get to eat first at a church dinner, while the loser gets the leftovers.

"It's part of the American way of life," Clapp said. "People will compete at anything. Everybody needs motivation somewhat."

"Whether we like it or not, people get away from God and the church, and these things become habit like anything else. So if you can get people to come for four weeks in a row, they'll keep coming. I don't mind being a little mundane to get people in."

"The success of the contest will be to reach people. The success of the church will be to minister to them."

Church Struggles to Balance  
Ministry Within, Without

By Jim Newton

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Should a church primarily seek to win others to Christ and help Christians grow in the faith through worship and Bible study?

Or, should it seek primarily to minister to the needs of persons outside the four walls of the church through a world missions program?

Members of Second Baptist Church here have declared the church must do both. According to pastor James W. Hatley, if it fails to do either or both, the church will miss its mission and purpose.

Three years ago, Second Baptist adopted the report of its long range planning committee using a process suggested by the Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department: "It shall be the purpose of this church to witness to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, to maintain worship services, to give instruction in Christian doctrines and to minister in the name of Christ to human need wherever it is found," the church stated. "For this purpose the church is open to all persons."

A missions survey of members of the church confirmed the congregation's concern for the entire city, with 96 percent of survey respondents saying the church should seek to minister to the rich and poor, black and white, imprisoned and needy in the greater Memphis area. However, they were split on whether the church should "minister first to our fellow church members, and then to non-members and the needy." Of members responding, 48 percent disagreed, 44 percent agreed.

In recent years, however, the church members have been involved in as many as 50 different community mission action projects. They employed Maurice Graham, a graduate of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., to coordinate the church's mission program as director of church and community missions. Among ministries the church is involved in are:

--An extensive ministry to the mentally retarded at Arlington Developmental Center, a state mental institution; a "Love in Action" Bible study and worship program for the mentally retarded; a Vacation Bible School for the mentally retarded; a "grandmothers to the mentally retarded" program; and volunteer involvement in the Memphis Association of Retarded Children (MARC) and a halfway house for the mentally retarded.

--Heavy involvement in the volunteer programs at Shelby County Jail and Penal Farm, nearby Fort Pillow State Prison, a local transition center and pre-release program for prisoners, and a first-offender parole program; a ministry to the aging at Mary Galloway and Rest Haven nursing homes;

--Involvement in numerous other community and social service organizations such as a local runaway house for teenagers, suicide prevention programs, the Mallory Heights Baptist Mission, Beale Street Day Care Center, Tennessee Home for Incurables, tutoring programs and several other ministry projects.

Under Graham's direction, missions committee members coordinate the areas of (1) race relations and the poor, (2) adult rehabilitation and alcoholics; (3) youth rehabilitation and drug addiction, (4) internationals and language groups, (5) the aging and the sick, (6) the mentally retarded; (7) mental health and suicide prevention, (9) missions education.

Mac Bailey, vice president of United Inns, Inc., and chairman of the church's missions committee, said, however, that the great missions thrust of the church was not through the missions committee, but through individual efforts of concerned Christians in the church.

The congregation, in its early history, had many struggles in discovering its mission. In 1963, about 400 members of Bellevue Baptist Church **split off from** the larger downtown congregation and organized Second Baptist. They called Brooks Ramsey as their first pastor. The church began to grow rapidly, moving to its beautiful, tree-covered location in a wealthy East Memphis section and reaching a peak membership of 1,800 members in 1969.

Ramsey dealt with the question of racial justice in Memphis. In 1969, he became involved in the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike and preached a strong sermon following the assassination of Martin Luther King. The deacons voted to recommend that the church fire the pastor. Instead, the church voted to give Ramsey a vote of confidence, and to fire the entire deacon body and re-elect new deacons. But more than 300 members left between 1969 and 1970, and another hundred left the next year. Some split off to form another church and others left who were unhappy over the race issue stance, according to reports.

Soon after Hatley came as pastor, he sought to lead the church to understand what the church is, what its mission is, what community it is seeking to reach, what its objectives are and how it should accomplish them. The long range planning committee that presented its report in 1973 suggested seven objectives which were adopted by the church.

Briefly, those seven objectives are: to worship, to witness and proclaim the gospel to the whole world, to meet the needs of all persons, to help Christian disciples grow through education, to provide programs for the total membership, to cooperate with other churches, denominations and groups, and "to search experimentally for new and innovative ways to function as the church of Jesus Christ."

Hatley said the most unique objective is the last one--to search experimentally for new and innovative ways to function as the church. Examples are numerous, he said, but one project was a series of four quarterly training sessions for the parents of and workers with mentally retarded persons in 16 counties in western Tennessee.

The church has also been involved in inter-faith relations services and dialogues; Hatley is the only Southern Baptist on the board of directors of Memphis' Metropolitan Interfaith Association (MIFA) and has taught Bible at a Catholic convent and girls' school.

Another ministry is an Easter project, "The Way of the Cross," in which people in the surrounding area are invited to the church during Passion Week to take a **walking** tour of the church grounds and participate in a dramatization of seven events in the last week in the life of Christ. Community response has been tremendous, Hatley said, with as many as 5,000 persons participating.

Bill Cockroft, president of Cockroft Lumber Co., and chairman of the deacons, described the church as a community of believers who want to be involved.

"Many people think the church should be confined to prayer and Bible study and preaching, but I feel the church should be a recharging place for laymen so they can get involved in the world," Cockroft said.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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Baptist Academy Given  
Elementary School Building

Baptist Press  
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SEYMOUR, Tenn. (BP)--A building which formerly housed the Seymour Elementary School has been donated to Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy here by a Gatlinburg, Tenn., businessman.

Luther "Coot" Ogle, a motel owner and restaurateur and trustee of the academy, made the presentation to Hubert Smothers, Harrison-Chilhowee president, and John J. Buell, a Knoxville pastor and chairman of the academy's board of trustees.

Ogle, who purchased the building adjacent to the academy campus from the Sevier County School Board, asked that the building, which the academy has named the Luther "Coot" Ogle Building, be used for expansion of the academy's academic program.

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