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Millington Center: 'A
Home Away From Home'

By Tim Nicholas

MILLINGTON, Tn. (BP)--Two years ago, a Navy enlisted man entered the Service Personnel Center near Memphis Naval Air Station here seeking counseling on how to find a wife.

About a year later, he was married to a girl he met at a social gathering at a Baptist church.

Such "services" are not the norm for the Baptist-sponsored serviceman's center, but for the layman directing the center--retired Navy Commander Willis (Chip) Reding--it was all in the line of duty.

The young man had been on a bus running from the base near Millington to Memphis when he saw the center's sign and yelled for the driver to stop. He told Reding he'd been pounding the streets all that day, lonely--afraid to tell a chaplain what he wanted because he thought he'd laugh.

Reding promised not to laugh and counseled him. The young man not only eventually found a wife but also accepted Christ as his Savior.

Not many servicemen can say they found a wife through the Baptist servicemen's center, but many of the 15,000 stationed at the Naval Air Station can say they have found free peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches, lemonade and family counseling there.

Sponsored by the Shelby Baptist Association, Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, the center offers a variety of ministries designed to be a "home away from home" for the servicemen and their families.

Steve Ketrick, for instance, a native of Tulsa, Okla., who works in the base legal office, said the center "helps keep me out of trouble."

Everyone who enters the center, located only about 200 yards off base, is clicked onto a calculator and given an introduction and an invitation to tour the facilities. The Christian witness is low key.

"Our idea was that we would have a low-key spiritual aspect here," noted Reding, "that we wouldn't hustle them off to the back room for a profession of faith."

"We do try, however, to be alert to the leadership of the Holy Spirit for counseling," he continued.

The center gets 99 percent enlisted men, "and the ones who come are usually interested in spiritual things," he said. "These past few years the lower pay grades have been getting more pay, so more are getting married. This invited problems in finance and in maturity. Being a long way from home also helps the problems add up."

Reding tries to make his counseling spiritual, explaining that the way to make it as a family is to have a relationship to the Lord. He has recorded 216 professions of faith since the center opened.

Nearly every time someone has made a decision, Reding says, the person had some influence on his life that led him to the center.

"One Bible verse I think is pertinent to the ministry here is John 6:44, where Jesus says 'No man cometh to me except the father which has sent me, draw him!'"

Lindsay Lopez, a retired Army serviceman who gave up a job as a sheet metal worker in Clarksville, Tenn., is Redding's assistant.

Also assisting is Billy Thomason, a clerk accountant for the city of Memphis who also serves as minister of outreach for Fairlawn Baptist Church. Thomason earned a diploma in theology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and hopes to go into mission work when he retires in a year.

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After more than two years of working with the center, he said, "It's enriched my life seeing God work through servicemen. Before I came here I thought they were all 'out in the world.' I found there were plenty of fine Christians in the service."

Servicemen walk up and down Navy Road, where the center is located, at all hours. Some see the signs and walk in. Some see tract racks and hastily retreat. Others sit on the sofa and plunk a guitar, drift to the television room, or challenge the winner of the Ping Pong game.

The signs outside the center offer only one clue as to its nature--the words "the agape place for military." Agape is a Greek word indicating the kind of love God has for people.

Besides providing a physical center for off duty hours, the center offers evening Bible studies led by a Navy man planning to enter the ministry and acts as a link between associational churches and the men in the barracks.

It also advertises wholesome entertainment and spreads the word about churches with a special interest in service personnel, such as McLean Baptist Church, which has a bunk residence for the men where they can sleep on Saturday nights, rap sessions, Bible study, breakfast makings, and Sunday morning services.

John Sexton, a serviceman from Pine County, Minn., reflected on what brings in people to the center.

"I like to stop in every once in a while. There isn't a lot of pressure like on base," he said. "It just kind of looks like a Christian place."

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Adapted from Nov., 1976 World Mission Journal
(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist editors

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Reach Them Now or Never,
Missionary Challenges

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LOUISVILLE (BP)--Millions of people around the world must be reached with the gospel now or they may never be reached, asserts Robert C. Davis, a former missionary to Viet Nam.

Davis' remarks came while he was speaking on the campus of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here as part of the seminary's Missions Emphasis Week program.

"Of four billion people in the world, 2.7 billion are not now being reached with the gospel," Davis says. He cites Viet Nam as an urgent example of how more nations are being closed to Christian missionaries.

"There are countries just like Viet Nam now--they (missionaries there) don't know how much time is left" before they are sent out of the country, Davis said.

The former missionary in Southeast Asia believes that region of the world must be reached now, and that God has opened the doors to evangelization there today.

"Thailand has asked for 25 new missionary couples to assist in evangelism there. The pressure of all the communist aggression opens people's hearts--now is the time to go," Davis asserts.

To accomplish this goal of reaching the world with the message of Christ, says Davis, "we're going to have to give top priority to world evangelization in every local church."

The former missionary to Viet Nam challenged his audience of seminary students to be open to serving God in remote areas of the globe.

"The best students in this seminary ought to be the ones to serve in the unreached areas of this earth," Davis said.



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Wrapup

CLC Urges Public School
Action, TV Morality Research

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, in annual session here, launched comprehensive programs of research and action on television morality and beverage alcohol abuse and passed resolutions calling for national action on public schools and urging careful attention by Christians to the moral issues in the national elections.

Members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) social concerns agency also voted a \$450,000 budget for 1976-77, including six percent salary cost of living adjustments for staff, and elected Forest H. Siler, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lawton, Okla., as chairman.

During three days of sessions, the commissioners also heard addresses by SBC President James L. Sullivan of Nashville, retired head of the SBC Sunday School Board, and James M. Dunn of Dallas, head of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Sullivan praised the commission's "conscience-probing on critical issues," such as race, which, he said, "brings unity to SBC agencies and churches" by causing them to prepare for crisis by thinking out the issues--"even when we are afraid to think." Dunn challenged Southern Baptists to be certain they have matched their much-publicized "born again religion" with a "born again ethic" which will truly apply biblical teachings to all areas of life.

The action on television morality will involve a comprehensive survey of television programming content, a series of public hearings on Christian morality and television programming in selected cities across the United States, and conferences with network officials, Federal Communications Commission members, and U. S. Congressmen. Commission staff will also prepare literature, including a special packet for denominational leaders.

The resolutions on public schools and moral issues in the national elections will be distributed widely to many persons, including the Democratic and Republican candidates for president and vice president.

The moral issues resolution urged 12.7 million Southern Baptists throughout the nation's largest Protestant denomination to "study carefully the positions of the political parties, the presidential candidates, and others seeking public office on moral issues related to concerns such as underemployment, inflation, family, race, taxes, health, energy, ecology, separation of church and state and peace with justice."

It further urged members of the 34,902 Southern Baptist churches across the nation to "participate at every level of the political process actively and prayerfully--sensitive to those who would substitute religious rhetoric for moral behavior, conscious of the difference between campaign promises and political realities, concerned for the actual development of liberty and justice for all, and committed to a citizenship which fosters private and public morality."

The public schools resolution, which will go to both President Gerald Ford and presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, calls on the President "to convene a White House Conference on Public School Education to bring together a cross section of interested and qualified Americans to consider ways to deal with the crisis faced by the public school systems."

The resolution, which also called on "all Southern Baptists to work to strengthen public school education throughout the nation," grew out of a one-day consultation the Christian Life Commission staff held last April to explore the public school situation.

The consultation grew out of an increasing public school crisis across the country, involving such issues as busing, moral values, the quality of education in public schools, and the loss of confidence by many in public school education.

The resolution noted that "the public school system has made a significant contribution to America's greatness as a nation" and that it "is essential to the continuing strength of our country."

In other action, the commissioners voted to begin extensive research and development of materials dealing with alcohol abuse.

Foy Valentine, commission executive secretary, said, "Southern Baptists are asking for more help with the growing problems related to beverage alcohol, and we are determined to respond to the need. As soon as the materials are completed we will distribute them to Southern Baptist churches and leaders."

John Harris, pastor of Pineville (La.) Park Baptist Church, was elected vice chairman of the commission, and Chevis F. Horne, pastor of First Baptist Church, Martinsville, Va., recording secretary.

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Golden Gate Will
Install New Dean

Baptist Press
9/17/76

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--W. Morgan Patterson will be installed as dean of academic affairs at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary here on Oct. 12, coinciding with the annual Founder's Day.

Harold K. Graves, president of the seminary, will preside over the ceremonies, and Charles A. Carter, chairman of the board of trustees from Jackson, Miss., will install the new dean.

Patterson's installation address will focus on the historical aspects of Founder's Day and will highlight some of the history of theological education and the Baptist celebration of the nation's bicentennial.

The new dean assumed duties Aug. 1, coming to the seminary from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., where he was director of graduate studies in the school of theology and professor of church history. He had served there since 1959. He led in designing and implementing the Ph.D. degree at Southern in 1974.

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CORRECTION

In BP news story of 9/15/76 entitled "Religion Writers Confer National Awards," please correct graph 2, line 5 as follows: "and the Arizona Republic in Phoenix, Gene Luptak, religion . . ." (rather than Airzona Star in Tucson).

Thanks,
Baptist Press