



BAPTIST PRESS

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Exclusion of Selma Church
Branded As 'Racist'

By Dan Martin

SELMA, Ala. (BP)--The possibility of a concerted move to integrate the white churches of the Selma (Ala.) Baptist Association was raised here in the aftermath of an associational action branded as "racist."

The 24 member churches of the association, at their recent annual meeting, refused to accept into membership Good News Baptist Church, a three-year old congregation which has an open door policy toward blacks. Opponents of the church cite factors other than race for its exclusion.

F. D. Reece, leader of the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march, said: "I think all of these churches should be integrated. It (the wall) should be broken down. In fact, we will.

"I think you cannot be a responsible Christian and sit around and allow this to be a part of our society without taking action to make sure it is eradicated."

Reece, a city councilman, principal of East Side Junior High School and pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Selma, added that black leaders "have talked about this."

Asked when such an effort will be made, Reece replied: "I am sure it will be more immediate than some people would like to see."

Southern Baptist leaders say such a move in the immediate aftermath of the upheaval in Plains (Ga.) Baptist Church over admission of blacks may serve notice on racism everywhere it may exist among Southern Baptists.

The action of the Selma Association comes in sharp contrast to actions of at least seven Southern Baptist state conventions which have passed statements opposing racial exclusiveness during and after the Plains action, and the decision of First Baptist Church, a white congregation in Tifton, Ga., to open its doors for the meeting of a black Baptist convention.

It also stands in counterpoint to a historic meeting in Birmingham, Ala., in which 5,000 black and white Baptists gathered to celebrate the Bicentennial. U. S. Rep. John Buchanan (R.-Ala.), a former Southern Baptist minister, had earlier told messengers the predominantly white Alabama Baptist Convention, which took part in the joint meeting: "How I thank God for the right decision" of the Plains Baptist Church to end racial discrimination.

In Selma, meanwhile, a controversy surrounds the rejection of Good News Baptist Church, a congregation of about 300 members.

John Hollingsworth, pastor of the church, says the reason for the rejection is the open door policy and the fact that three blacks--a couple and a teenage girl--are members of the church.

Ed Cruce, moderator of the association, says: "I don't think it was the main issue, but is an underlying factor. Several people were concerned about it."

Cruce, pastor of historic Shiloh Baptist Church in nearby Sardis, says most of the churches in the association have unwritten rules against admitting blacks to buildings or services, and several have written bylaws of prohibition.

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"The attitude of many of the people in the association is that if Good News wants to have black members, that is fine. The fear is that they will try to force their black members on other congregations," he said.

Those who favor Good News Church generally see the refusal to accept the church into fellowship along racial lines. Those opposed generally say other factors--not race--are influencing factors.

Cruce, who says he "personally favored" admission of Good News Church, says the "biggest question from messengers was about cooperation. They wanted to know if Good News really wants to cooperate with other churches in the association."

He said messengers questioned Hollingsworth about his organizational structure, financial stability and contributions to the Cooperative Program (Southern Baptist unified budget.)

Good News, although its collections topped \$80,000 last year, gave only "a very small amount--\$20 per month--to the Cooperative Program," Cruce said.

Also questioned was the fact the church does not have traditional Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), Brotherhood or Training Union, nor does it use Southern Baptist literature exclusively. (Some other churches in the association don't have WMU or Training Union, either, but are already members of the association, he said.)

"Those questions were important to a lot of people," the moderator, said, adding that Hollingsworth, a native Alabamian, is a "strong leader.. Personality was involved and several people claim John's greatest problem is that he just likes to push things . . . force issues . . . take over."

Others say Hollingsworth is seeking to "make change with a big club" and has "created a climate of confrontation." Cruce noted that he felt Hollingsworth "wanted the church to be rejected by the association" . . . and now is using the rejection to his own advantage.

Hollingsworth says he doesn't feel the church's ministry is to get all blacks to come to Good News Church. Noting that they invite everyone, black and white, to come, he said. "If Tom (Clark, a black member) and others leave and we never have a black member again, it will be all right. The point is that they are welcome to come. We put no more premium--or no less--on a black soul than on a white one."

The Good News pastor, whose church mainly reaches working class young people in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 salary range, says his people are "tired of fighting the Civil War. They are tired--literally--of hearing this thing about North and South and black and white."

He says he doesn't expect an influx of black members, even though the church has an open door. "I feel that in God's work we have principles. The barrier is the main thing that had to be overcome. We at Good News have settled this thing in our hearts that when you are truly born of God, you love your brother regardless of who he may be."

Another factor is that Good News Church grew out of a split with Fairview Baptist Church in December of 1973. Hollingsworth says the split was over two reasons: admission of blacks to worship services and qualification of deacons.

Bill Raley, current pastor of Fairview, says the issue was much more complicated than that. Referring to recent articles in the Selma Times Journal and Montgomery Advertiser, he says the church has been "unfairly criticized. I do not believe that race was the only issue. I think that was a manipulated issue . . . taken out of context.

"My people are not racists," Raley said, but added: "We most likely would not have an open door policy (at Fairview). I feel it would be in the best interest of our people not to have to have an open door policy at the present time."

Asked to amplify, Raley said: "This is one area where Christian churches have much room to grow . . . I think our people are progressing in this area. I think in time to come it will eventually occur."

Raley, asked if racism is a Christian attribute, did not answer directly, but said the issue is "stirring up difficulty . . . that we don't need during this time. I don't want to create problems or difficulties here in the church . . . I will not do anything to harm the church."

He added that he does not feel "blacks would benefit from coming here to our church. They have capable leaders. Even if we opened the church, I doubt very seriously if any would come. They have had an open door policy at Good News for three years and had only three members.

A civic leader, however, said the question is not whether blacks will go to a white church. "I don't think they are that much interested in going to a white church. I just want them to have the right to go if they want to."

Raley, Fairview's pastor for nearly three years, and the church abstained from voting on the question of the membership of Good News Church in the association, although Raley served on the petitionary letters committee, the associational body which investigated the application for membership.

Some charges were made that Raley sought membership on the committee in order to prevent Good News' membership, but Cruce denied such allegations even while admitting Raley had been in an "unfortunate position."

Hollingsworth, on the other hand, said: "Everyone I talked to says it was not good ethics for him to be on that committee."

"I think it was racism," Reece says of the rejection. "I have talked with John (Hollingsworth) several times . . . I admire him for his courage. Many whites would never take the steps he took. I am sure he has been ostracized . . . received many unpleasant comments. But I am sure he gets a good night's sleep and can look at himself."

Reece, who said he regrets to see Baptists as the "worst holdouts" against racial openness, commented that the association's racism "stirs my feelings of regret that even at this point in time we still have people in our communities who have not risen to the level of accepting a man regardless of his color."

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Tenn. Budgets \$9.4 Million,
Urges Prayer for Carter

Baptist Press
11/19/76

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--"Messengers" to the 102nd annual session of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (TBC) here adopted a record \$9.4 million Cooperative Program unified budget, covenanted to pray for President-elect Jimmy Carter, and decried Christian movements that drain from local church resources while ignoring the churches.

J. Ralph McIntyre, pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn., was elected president. Kenneth Sparkman, director of missions for Gibson County Baptist Association, became the state's first associational director to be elected to a convention office. He was named second vice president.

The 1977 Cooperative Program budget provides for 33.33 percent of receipts to be distributed to Southern Baptist mission causes worldwide.

A resolution urging prayer for President-elect Carter cited a convention address by U. S. Rep. John Buchanan (R.-Ala.) in which the congressman reminded messengers and guests that the United States is a "great and good land."

The resolution noted, "Be it resolved that we covenant together to pray earnestly for the President-elect that he may be God's man in the White House."

A resolution stemming from an address by outgoing TBC President Carroll C. Owen, of Paris, Tenn., was adopted by messengers.

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"There are many movements in our day which, while owning the name of Christ, ignore the local church," the resolution said. "Some of the movements drain from the local church members' abilities and tithes and offerings."

"This convention reaffirm(s) its commitment to the local church of which Christ is the head and for which he died; and . . . we wholeheartedly support the missionary enterprises of our local churches and Tennessee Baptist Convention."

A move to rescind a 1974 action that created the Tennessee Baptist Service Corporation, which has responsibility for coordinating programs of ministry and facilities for senior adults, was overwhelmingly defeated after about a half-hour of debate, according to reports.

Messengers then rejected a recommendation by the convention's executive board to invoke a \$15 million limit for construction by the Service Corporation of senior adults facilities at three sites. They approved, instead, a substitute motion that set the corporation's debt ceiling at \$5 million, which a spokesman said was agreeable with corporation officials.

The corporation was told it could go ahead with the most viable project, which appears at this time to be, a spokesman noted, Belmont Plaza, next to Belmont (Baptist) College in Nashville.

The Plaza is to be a residential project for senior adults. The corporation will have to come back to the convention for additional indebtedness beyond the \$5 million.

In other action, messengers created a new convention-elected office of registration secretary and decided to meet in 1977 at Central Baptist Church, Bearden, Tenn. (near Knoxville), Nov. 15-17.

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La. Adopts Record Budget,
Resolves to Pray for Carter

Baptist Press
11/19/76

SHREVEPORT, La. (BP)--Louisiana Baptist Convention "messengers" in 129th annual session here adopted a record \$7 million Cooperative Program unified budget, plus an additional \$1 million for advance and challenge goals, resolved to pray for President-elect Jimmy Carter, voiced concern over encroachments by government into Baptist life, and re-elected their convention president to a second term.

For the second year in a row a church staff person, other than a pastor, was elected to office.

In what was described as a quiet, non-controversial meeting, messengers again chose to raise Cooperative Program receipts to Southern Baptist causes worldwide, this time from 32 to 33 percent. A year ago, denominational causes worldwide were raised from 31.5 to 32 percent.

A commitment to pray for President-elect Carter, a Southern Baptist deacon, included an admonition for him to "call upon God for guidance and help in leading our nation." A wire was sent to Carter expressing the intent of the resolution.

Messengers adopted a resolution citing the "historic position" of Baptists on separation of church and state and noted the "gradual encroachment by government into Baptist organized life by means of licensing and taxation.

"Whereas, the Bill of Rights of our national (U. S.) constitution guarantees freedom of religion, therefore, be it resolved that we urge our people to give watchful diligence to these encroachments, and be it further resolved that we urge our political leaders to maintain the position of separation of church and state.

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Randall Sledge, a Winnsboro, La., pastor, was elected president of the convention's executive board, in a special board meeting during the sessions. And Jerry O'Neal, minister of music for Istrouma Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, became the second non-pastor church staff member elected to office. He was elected second vice president.

Clifton R. Tennison, pastor of First Baptist Church, West Monroe, La., was re-elected to a second one-year term as president of the convention.

During the convention it was announced that Don F. Mabry, a native of Louisiana presently director of church extension for the Florida Baptist Convention staff, will head the Louisiana Convention's missions-ministries division. Mabry was formerly director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's department of surveys and special studies.

Louisiana messengers will hold their Nov. 14-16, 1977, session at Gwinn Auditorium on the campus of Louisiana College, a Baptist school in Pineville.

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Florida Baptists Commend
Plains Stand Against Racism

Baptist Press
11/19/76

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (BP)--Messengers to the 115th annual session of the Florida Baptist State Convention commended Plains (Ga.) Baptist Church for its decision to end racial discrimination and deleted a requirement that associations be consulted in filling vacancies on state boards.

In other action, Florida Southern Baptists elected Barney Burks, Jr., a layman and mayor of Pensacola, Fla., as convention president, and voted a record \$7.5 million Cooperative Program unified budget, with 47 percent of that amount going to worldwide Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) mission causes.

The resolution on the action of President-elect Jimmy Carter's home church in Georgia to wipe out prohibition against blacks, made it clear that it was passed without intent to violate or trespass upon the independence or autonomy of the Plains Church, a spokesman said.

But it declared: "The tradition of autonomy has never operated to weaken or erode the common commitment of Southern Baptists to obey the inspired word of God as bequeathed to us in Scriptures.

"The same Scriptures," it continued, "have enjoined us as Christians to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all without regard to color, race or other irrelevant distinctions."

It said further that "recent developments. . . (in Plains) have suggested to some that we as Florida Baptists should now again make our spiritual convictions in this regard (opposing racism) known in clear and positive terms.

". . . We do hereby recognize and respect the decision . . ." of the Plains Baptist Church ". . . to communicate the gospel to all persons regardless of race."

The action on associational consultation on filling vacancies on state boards ended a three year policy. It was eliminated because of the argument by James Monroe, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Walton Beach, Fla., that it violates longstanding Baptist polity that each Baptist body (church, association, state or national) should be sovereign and independent.

The convention will meet Nov. 14-16, 1977, at St. Petersburg, Fla.

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Georgia Church Opens Doors
To Black Baptist Convention

Baptist Press
11/19/76

By Jack Harwell

TIFTON, Ga. (BP)--"Last week's Atlanta newspapers carried the headline 'Showdown in Plains Baptist Church'. But tonight there is a showcase in First Baptist Church of Tifton."

Thus spoke Cameron M. Alexander, president of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia, a black Baptist body.

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He was addressing the closing session of Georgia's largest black Baptist convention, meeting in the sanctuary of First Baptist Church, Tifton, one of the largest white congregations in southwest Georgia.

The General Missionary Convention has about 500,000 members in almost 2,000 churches. Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Tifton hosted their annual convention, but its sanctuary was too small for large crowds.

So convention officers asked First Baptist Church in Tifton for use of its 1,400-seat sanctuary for the closing service.

Pastor W. Ches Smith, III, and deacons of First Baptist Church voted unanimously to open their facilities to the black Baptists. And they volunteered their church choirs to bring special music.

Smith, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, said to the black Baptists, "I greet you in the name of 12.7 million Southern Baptists, including over 1 million white Georgia Baptists.

"I could wish that occasions like this should not be exceptional events," he added, "but expressions of normal relations between two great bodies of Christians in Georgia."

Earle F. Stirewalt, secretary of work with National Baptists for the Georgia Baptist Convention, told The Christian Index, state newspaper for Southern Baptists in Georgia: "When the congregation stood and joined the choirs to sing the closing number, 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', it was one of the most moving experiences I have ever encountered."

The General Missionary Baptist Convention is one of two black Baptist conventions in Georgia. The other is the New Era Baptist Convention, whose president is L. Scott Spell, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Savannah.

Tifton is about 60 miles from Plains, Ga., where the home congregation of President-elect Jimmy Carter voted Nov. 14 to remove racial barriers and open its worship and membership to all peoples.

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Jack Harwell is editor of the Christian Index, state newspaper for Southern Baptists in Georgia.

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Child of Missionary
Killed in Alabama

Baptist Press
11/19/76

BIRMINGHAM (BP)--Nonnie Lee Deal, 16, oldest daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. John L. Deal, drowned here when a car she and two friends were riding in skidded off a road, went over an embankment and plunged into a lake.

Also killed in the accident, was 14-year-old Denise Keller, a Birmingham girl who was reportedly driving the car, which belonged to the third person in the vehicle, a youth about 18 who was riding in the back seat.

He managed to get out of the car, which settled upside down, reports said, in the mud on the lake's bottom. The youth was "shaken and quite dazed," according to one account, but was treated and released.

The Deals are missionaries to Malaysia on furlough in Birmingham. Deal is a teacher at the Malaysia-Singapore Baptist Theological Seminary in Renang, Malaysia.

Other survivors include her parents; two sisters, Jonja and Sheralon; a brother, Eddy; all of Birmingham; paternal and maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Deal and Mr. and Mrs. E. F. Moncrief, respectively, all of Dothan, Ala.

Funeral services for Miss Deal were held at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, and another service was held in Dothan. The deaths occurred on Nov. 17.

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