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Minister Finds 'Fat City'
A Tough Place to Work

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A man plods up the stairs. After a rustling of keys, a gray door swings open then slams shut behind the stooped figure.

The sun has gone down and the somber gray walls are lit only by the tangerine haze of the security lights. He is locked in; the world is locked out.

Don Rahaim, a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Seminary, sees this scene repeated day after day in his "parish," a group of swank apartment buildings in the burgeoning New Orleans suburb named "Fat City."

Rahaim's mission in these upper class buildings is a pilot project of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in which a trained minister lives and relates with inhabitants of big city apartment complexes. It is offered in cooperation with First Baptist Church, Kenner, a New Orleans area congregation.

"It's like a prison," says Rahaim. "The biggest problem is that these people get home from work and lock themselves into their apartments, and they lock themselves out from anybody else. They don't want to know anyone. They are extremely suspicious of everyone. They believe everyone is out to rip them off.

"It's sad," he says, "because many of them have hurts that could be done away with probably if they would just open up to other people."

Presently, Rahaim is trying to find ways to effectively minister to singles in the complex.

"I'm hoping they (singles) will really get activated, really get on fire for the Lord, and then go back to their apartment areas and reach out to others. We try to go door-to-door and tell people that there will be a Bible study on Friday night in the recreation room.

"People say they will come, they will tell you anything--even that they are crazy--just to get you to go away," he says.

Soon, however, small victories were won," Rahaim says.

"I remember one night a friend of mine was helping me with a Bible study and hot dog roast for some younger children, and the talk among them all was about a little girl in the complex planning to run away that night.

"My friend was able to locate the little girl while I was working with the other young people and invited her to come and join us. The girl came to the fellowship and Bible study and later we took her back to her apartment only to find she was being cared for by a court-appointed guardian who was not there.

"Only the guardian's grandfather was there, and he was very drunk," recalls Rahaim, "and we were very hesitant to leave her. The guardian, as it turned out, was being paid a baby sitter's wage to watch after the girl and was using her to keep house... a regular slave situation."

"The manager soon called me and told me something would have to be done about the little girl. I talked to the guardian who agreed to let her go if she could be placed with someone else.

"The girl's father is living and works hard but has only a limited education. He isn't able to make enough money to provide for the girl. My friend, who has three children of her own, took the child in and worked with her.

"Today," beams Rahaim, "the girl is a different person."

Her father saw her recently and was so impressed with the impact of a Christian home on his child's life that he has begun attending church and has a new outlook on life. He has even allowed a New Orleans Seminary staff family to adopt her and "things are going great for the girl and her father," Rahaim says.

Rahaim became interested in the pilot program when he was approached with the idea by the seminary's off-campus work coordinator, professor Paul Stevens.

The Home Mission Board considers the project as an experimental outreach of its extension program.

First Church, Kenner, has contributed financially to the new outreach by paying Rahaim's salary and providing him with some living costs.

"A Christian couple could probably do the work better than a single person, especially a male," he says. "Most people will let their kids go anywhere with a woman, but when a man takes an interest, all kinds of suspicions arise."

The city's sounds creep in with darkness, spread over the expressways, gray walls and barred windows as the "inmates" of an upper class apartment complex lock their doors and jail themselves for another night.

Rahaim believes there is more to life than running scared or suspicious.

Convincing others is often difficult, but Rahaim says he has to try.

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Carter Election Tops 3 National Religious Polls

NEW YORK(BP)--Religious issues in the U.S. Presidential campaign ranked first in at least three year-end national religious top 10 story polls and second in another.

The election of Jimmy Carter and the election's attendant religious significance was named the top story by the Religious News Service, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Baptist Press. It drew a close second in the polling of the Religious Newswriters Association, made up of religion writers from the nation's secular news media, which ranked the decision of the Episcopal Church to ordain women priests in the number one spot.

All during the campaign, the statement of Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher and deacon, that he was "born again" focused unprecedented national media exposure on Southern Baptists in particular and evangelicals in general. Personal religious beliefs of candidates and church-state implications of those beliefs became an issue for the first time since 1960, when John Kennedy's Catholicism was the center of discussion.

Other religious issues mentioned in reports on the four polls contrasting positions of the Democratic and Republican platforms on parochial, abortion and public school prayer.

In the Americans United poll, which ranked the most significant church-state issues of 1976, second and third places went respectively to lawsuits filed by the organization challenging federal aid to New York parochial schools and federal financing of Transcendental Meditation programs in New Jersey public schools.

Fourth through tenth in the Americans United poll went respectively to:

4. Actions by voters in Missouri, Nebraska and Alaska defeating amendments to state constitutions that would have provided some forms of state aid to sectarian schools or colleges.

5. The 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court decision on June 21 upholding the constitutionality of a Maryland state aid program to church-related colleges, providing that the aid not be used directly for sectarian purposes.

6. A suit filed by Americans United in Washington state which challenges the practice of public utilities' aiding sectarian institutions on the grounds that such aid amounts to an "invisible tax" for religion.

7. Apparent end to the federally financed voucher experiment, which would aid parents of children in parochial schools, when voters in several New Hampshire towns and the East Hartford Conn. board of education rejected voucher plans.

8. Defeat in Congress of a plan introduced by U.S. Sen. James Buckley to provide tax deductions for parents of children in non-public schools.

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9. Efforts of the Internal Revenue Service to begin defining the missions of churches and their integrated auxiliaries, and the criticism of such effort by church groups.

10. The upholding by the U.S. Supreme Court of released time programs for religious instruction, in effect reaffirming its 1952 "Zorach" decision.

The Religious Newswriters Association, after ranking the Episcopal decision first and the election second, voted a third place finish to an October conference in Detroit, sponsored by the nation's Roman Catholic Bishops as a Bicentennial project, to call for major reforms in the church in such areas as birth control, divorce and the role of women.

The RNA's fourth slot went to the deepening schism in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which has led to some 100 churches leaving the denomination and the formation of a new denomination, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

Placing fifth through ninth, according to an RNA news release, were the controversy surrounding Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church; the International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia in May; abortion as a presidential election issue; the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision allowing Karen Quinlan to be removed from a mechanical respiration; and (in a tie for ninth) a Gallup Poll report that more than one-third of all Americans claim to have a "born again" experience, and the growing movement for divorce and marriage reform in the Catholic Church.

The Religious News Service ranked the Episcopal decision second to the election and gave third, fourth and sixth ratings respectively to the Lutheran split, the Detroit Catholic bishops' conference, and the International Eucharistic Congress.

Fifth place went to the story of dissident French Archbishop Marcell Lebre's denunciation of the Vatican II reforms and defiance of a suspension order from the Vatican by public celebration of the forbidden Tridentine (Latin) mass on several occasions.

Seventh through tenth spots went respectively to the peace movement organized in Northern Ireland by two Roman Catholic women which has acquired mounting Protestant support; church-state tensions engulfing a number of nations; the end of the Lebanese civil war between Christian and Moslem factions; and increasing attention to human sexuality in churches, including a Vatican document on sexual ethics, a pastoral letter by the U.S. bishops, and condemnations of homosexual behavior by several Protestant denominations.