



February 17, 1977

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Southern Baptists Are
'Home' in New England

By Larry Jerden

NASHVILLE (BP)--The timing has been good for Southern Baptists in New England, whose sights are set on state convention status by 1980.

Increased recognition from fellow New Englanders with the candidacy and election of U.S. President Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist layman, and with the emerging of scattered but strong and stable churches, Southern Baptists of the six state-Baptist General Association of New England are generally optimistic about their future.

New England Baptists, with almost 7,000 church members and 59 churches and missions, stretch from the southern shores of Connecticut and Rhode Island through Massachusetts, across Vermont and New Hampshire, on to the coast and woodlands of Maine. The General Association presently has work with seven language groups, besides English, including Spanish, Greek, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Italian and Polish.

Some churches were begun by southern "transplants," civilian and military. Others were begun by native New Englanders, who saw in Southern Baptists the beliefs and actions that fit their concept of Christianity.

However they were begun, the Southern Baptist churches in New England now are indigenous --of, by and for New Englanders. Seventeen of the 34 congregations in the Southern New England Association (SNEA), for example, (one of three in the general association), have few if any southerners; nine definitely have none, and no congregation is totally made up of southerners.

Harold Lindsey, a Southern Baptist home missionary serving as director of missions for Massachusetts, declared that "we are beginning to do what we came to do--we're jelling as a native church...this is a breakthrough."

With increasing membership coming from native New Englanders, Southern Baptists are finding increasing acceptance, and Carter's publicity has admittedly helped their identity.

Bill Graham, pastor of Middletown, R.I., Baptist Church, was elated last fall when a local television station and a newspaper gave coverage to the New England Association's meeting his church hosted.

"They wanted to know about the church in Plains," he admitted, "but we got one minute on the evening news. I doubt very much if three years ago the local TV station would have sent a camera to the association meeting."

Others have noted that since Jimmy Carter's candidacy and election, they have not had to explain who Southern Baptists are--or when they do, they receive a more favorable hearing. But even without Carter, New England Baptists feel they have turned a corner--"It's a new day" is a phrase that is repeated over and over.

"There are still some rough situations, some financial and numerical struggles, some discouraging moments," noted Tom Biles, SNEA's director of missions, "but our people are generally optimistic. It's a new day. We now have some strong churches--one, Pleasant Valley in Groton, Conn., runs over 300 on Sunday, started four missions and gives strong to the Cooperative Program," unified budget of Southern Baptists.

"The new day," said Graham, "is that we are growing churches," he said. "For years, New England was a great place for doing spectaculars that looked good, made a good show, but didn't lock people into a local church--and they were things I think the gospel should be doing. But now we are growing churches, and the by-product is that it is strengthening the association."

Much of the early work, and that which has become the most widely known, has been in Christian social ministries (CSM)--attempts to minister to the countless physical and spiritual problems that beset the elderly, the poor, the forgotten and the rejected.

One of the better-known works is that of Worcester Baptist Church, where for several years Bob Tremaine was pastor. Carl Holden CSM director for Greater Worcester Ministries, which includes and is centered around the church in Worcester, Mass.

He became involved in a ministry to alcoholics and helped set up an organization for them. But it was only one of what was to become a lengthy list of ministries centered in the old church building.

"We are right in the heart of the inner city...where it's hard to build a traditional church." Since a traditional church wouldn't go, ministries such as a youth coffee house, commodity foods delivery program, senior lunches, literacy work and renovating area houses became the approach.

In other parts of New England as well, Baptists are involved in Christian social ministries --often through local churches. And at a time when some are questioning the spending of large sums of home mission money in such ministries, the growing and strengthening of local churches throughout the six-state area may offer the potential solution to the problem.

At Montpelier Baptist Chapel in Vermont, for example, the small congregation already has a ministry to transients, a mothers club, and is the storage and distribution center for the community's food pantry.

Screven Memorial Baptist Church in Portsmouth, N.H., with about 250 resident members, operates a Christian coffee house on the beach during the summer, has half a dozen women taking literacy training, and is starting a ministry to the deaf.

The coffee house, the Agape Inn, reports about 100 conversions a year from its ministry.

The trend toward strengthening the churches is unmistakable. "All New England seems to be moving into a new, yet tried and familiar strategy for us," Lindsay said, "It's a move toward churches and associations, and away from the original concept of pastoral missionaries and directors. It's more church centered."

With some 60 congregations, the list of success stories of Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in New England has become a lengthy one. There is the Danbury, Conn., Baptist Church, that began as a mission of East Hartford church, became the third full-time SBC church in New England, and now has its own missions in Waterbury, Naugatuck, and Fairfield.

Another "success" story is that of Marion Hays, pastor-missionary at Providence, R.I. "Growth has been slow, steady, and consistent," he noted. "Seventy resident members doesn't sound like much--doesn't sound big in the South, but it's a lot bigger than the congregation of four I preached to my first Sunday up here."

Success for some New England churches is measured in reaching membership goals of 200 or 300. For others, like Providence, a strong 70 to 100 is a sign of vitality. But for Maine Street Church in Brunswick, Me., sheer existence after a series of short-term pastorates and long periods without a pastor is its own measure of success.

If there could be a "most indigenous" SBC church in New England, Brunswick could be it. Layman Tom Atkins and his family were the prime moving forces in beginning the church, and Tom's father-in-law, Reginald Cook Gordon, was the spiritual center of that thrust.

An antique dealer for 50 years, Gordon has had a life-long interest in theology. Through his reading, he concluded that he should become a Southern Baptist "because I was theologically aligned with them."

The Brunswick church got its beginning after the Atkinses visited Bangor, Maine's, SBC church. Brunswick became a mission of Bangor, and after the Air Force base at Bangor closed, called its pastor to Brunswick.

Once the church started, the Brunswick Naval Air Station gave the congregation about an 80/20 southern majority. That has now reversed itself--but Atkins doesn't feel southerners are doing "mission" work in New England, anyway.

"Some of our friends ask why we don't affiliate with a 'local' group," Atkins reflected. "We feel Southern Baptists are local--we feel SBC denotes doctrine and polity, not region."

"You Southern Baptists aren't doing mission work up here," Gordon added. "You're coming home. The first Baptist church in the South, at Charleston, S.C., started in Maine--you're just coming back home."

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

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Congressional Ethics Code
May Be Revised this Year

By Carol Franklin

WASHINGTON (BP)--A spate of hearings on Capitol Hill may result in a revised code of ethics for government personnel. Public outcry over the Watergate scandal and revelations of impropriety in the Congress have led to proposed legislation which is scheduled for action in the Senate and the House of Representatives sometime in March.

Last year the House of Representatives established the Commission on Administrative Review to recommend changes in the House code of ethics. The commission, chaired by Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), has released recommendations following a series of public hearings. Obey described the changes as a "tough, realistic approach to the question of financial ethics for members of the House."

The commission recommendations would eliminate private office accounts, limit outside income and require extensive financial disclosures by members of the House and their principal assistants.

The recommendations of the commission have not been universally praised by members of Congress.

Some objections to the commission recommendations seem to be partisan. The House Republican Task Force on Reform issued counter proposals. Rep. Henson Moore (R-La.) said, "The Republicans in the House are taking the lead in the matter of reform. We expect the Democrats to follow."

Rep. Lawrence Coughlin (R-Pa.), chairman of the Republican task force, said that some of the proposals are tougher than the commission's while others may not be so stringent. He called for strict auditing procedures. "The recommendations of the commission focus on disclosure without dealing with the issue of accountability," Coughlin said.

Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.) questioned the constitutionality of some aspects of the financial disclosure requirements. Revealing a spouse's income is "a statutory problem," McClory told the commission. "Section 6103 of the code says that separate tax returns can't be disclosed. Disclosure should be restricted to areas the member has direct control over," he said.

Yet another facet to this complex issue is the proposed congressional pay raise scheduled to go into effect February 19. Unless the House votes on the matter it will take effect automatically.

Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Cal.) said, "The pay raise issue cannot be separated from the present concern over ethics reform. . . . Adopting a pay raise without first enacting these reforms could very well undermine the dedication and sincerity with which these reforms will later be pursued."

The House has also voted to investigate the so-called "Korean connection" between members of Congress and representatives of the South Korean government who allegedly offered gifts in return for voting in favor of continued support for the regime of Park Chung Hee.

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Although the vote in the House to carry out this investigation passed 388-0 there is skepticism about the ability of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, authorized to make the inquiry, to get tough with offenders.

The Senate entered the arena of ethics reform somewhat later than the House. A special committee on official conduct chaired by Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) has held public hearings on ethics reform for the Senate. This committee is using the recommendations of the House Commission on Administrative Review as the basis for their work on a stricter code of ethics.

Private groups such as common cause have issued strong statements in favor of reform in government. President Carter established guidelines for his appointees to deal with conflict of interest and ethics.

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Baptist Multi-racial Meeting
In New Orleans Draws 1,000

Baptist Press
2/17/77

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President James L. Sullivan challenged more than 1,000 persons attending the first annual Baptist-sponsored Multi-racial Christian Fellowship here, "Reach out to heal, not asking who or what background, but 'What do they need and how can I help?'"

Sullivan, T. J. Jemison, general secretary of the 7 million-member National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), and Robert L. Lee, executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention were among speakers.

"This meeting testifies to the fact that we can all minister together. This is our task until Christ comes," said Sullivan. Jemison, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La., commented, "God has been perfecting this moment for a long time. If we have faith God has the power. This nation can be turned around to face God . . . It's later than we think."

Weatherford noted, "WMU has led the way in multi-racial relations for a number of years. I learned early in life that God has no favorites." And Lee concluded, "We can be bystanders watching the change or we can be participants in change."

President Jimmy Carter has been invited as the 1978 speaker, but no confirmation has been received, a spokesman said. Proceeds from this year's banquet-meeting, attended by blacks, whites, Koreans, Cambodian and Spanish-speaking Baptists, will go to help "first offenders" as an alternate to crime, the spokesman said.

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SBC 2nd in 1976 Giving
To American Bible Society.

Baptist Press
2/17/77

NEW YORK (BP)--Southern Baptists were second in contributions to the American Bible Society (ABS) at yearend 1976, marking the first time since 1963 the 12.9 million member denomination was not first in giving to the Bible distribution agency.

The American Lutheran Church (ALC) finished 1976 in the number one spot with total contributions of \$343,627, almost four times what they gave in 1975, according to an ABS report released here.

Southern Baptists gave \$275,631 in 1976, an increase of \$37,077 over 1975, and United Methodists ranked third with \$143,405, for a \$10,812 increase.

Southern Baptists were first reported to be running second in ABS contributions in September, 1976, when the ALC topped all givers.

The ALC increase, an ABS spokesman told Baptist Press back in September, was due to an oversubscription of a ALC missions appeal, which resulted in a special \$245,000 grant to the society.

Overall, seventy-six denominations and other sources contributed \$1,739,194, compared with \$1,453,920 in 1975. Major amounts came also from the Bible-a-Month Club, \$134,110; Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, \$96,607; chaplains, \$92,803; miscellaneous, \$84,539; Lutheran Church in America (LCA), \$72,445; the American Baptist Churches in the USA, \$56,248; Church of the Nazarene, \$48,337; Seventh Day Adventists, \$45,165; United Presbyterian Church in the USA, \$38,707; Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), \$37,256; Mennonite Church, \$32,482.

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