



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Trentham Declines Scolding  
Carter on Vatican Envoy

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Carter's pastor declined to criticize his best-known parishioner for appointing a personal representative to the Vatican, but said he hopes a full-scale ambassadorship will not follow.

In a radio interview with three religious journalists including one from Baptist Press, Charles A. Trentham, pastor of the First Baptist Church here, noted that the practice among modern-day presidents to appoint such envoys to Vatican City dates to 1936 and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"At the moment, I do not think that the appointment of Mr. Walters... is a departure from what has been going on with the last succession of presidents," Trentham said.

"My attitude at the moment," he continued, "is that there are over 700 million Catholics in the world with whom we need some conversation..."

Trentham also said, however: "I do believe in the separation of church and state and hope that this will not grow into an ambassadorship."

Asked if he was conscious that certain admonitions from the pulpit might appear as though he were lecturing the President, Trentham replied: "I am very conscious of that and I consciously refrain from lecturing the President. I respect him as a person, a brother in Christ who has the same access to God that I have, who knows that the Spirit of God will speak to him personally about whatever concerns him. So I do not try to throw the weight of the pulpit behind any issue."

Throughout the interview, Trentham underscored his conviction that his first concern is to be pastor to the President and First Family rather than advisor on public questions.

He said that after the first service attended by the Presidential family, during which several family members joined First Baptist, he told the President that neither he nor the church wanted "to be in your way when we are not needed" but "never out of your way when we are needed."

Trentham also disclosed that a large percentage of the calls and letters he receives these days are requests to send messages or arrange meetings with Carter. He said he will not be used as an intermediary for such requests or to lobby on issues.

The 58-year-old pastor also told the reporters that when Carter decided to join the historic congregation six blocks from the White House, "I determined... to preach the heart of the gospel."

He continued, "I do not attempt to be sensational nor to grab headlines unless issues have a moral perimeter or center. I do not feel that they are really the province of the pulpit."

Trentham went on to say, however, that "I don't mean to say that politics is not the concern of the minister. I think that politics should be the concern of everyone, for being a good citizen means in a democracy being political."



Soul City: 'A Ministry of  
Presence and Friendship'

By Richard Penton

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--For a seminary student looking for a place to minister, Soul City sounds like a heavenly idea.

Although he wouldn't describe the work as "heavenly," Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary student Mike Williams sees the role he has played in Soul City, N.C., as a "ministry of presence and friendship."

Williams, whose home is St. Simons Island, Ga., has served as coordinator of the Soul City Interfaith Committee, which provides a ministry to the new planned community.

Soul City is being developed as a self-contained town, open to all, in an effort to counteract some of the problems of American cities.

Founded under the leadership of Floyd McKissick, a former civil rights attorney, who cites the principles of free enterprise and individual opportunity, the project was initiated in 1968 and construction began in 1972.

Over 100 people are now fulltime residents of the community, which has been financed by individual investment and guaranteed loans through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Williams says a major benefit of Soul City is giving people a feeling of self worth. "The people have a sense of pride when they talk about Soul City," he observed, "because it's their place and their opportunity."

The same year construction began, the Interfaith Committee was organized. Its purpose is to work through the area churches in extending a ministry to Soul City and to develop a program that can also be used in other planned communities.

The committee is composed largely of representatives of regional church organizations, including the North Carolina Baptist Convention. Nine denominations are now represented. Williams began serving as coordinator of the Interfaith Committee on a part-time basis in April 1976. As its only regular employee, his responsibilities have encompassed virtually all the activities which the committee supports.

Williams' ministerial role has been to the total community rather than to a particular church. He describes his duties as "anything that a minister is called upon to do," and recognizes that his "congregation extends as far as the county is wide."

A major function of Williams' position has involved the coordination of efforts among the various churches in the area. Although no church buildings exist yet in Soul City, Williams has led in regular worship services and Bible study groups.

He has set up a counseling program as well as various other ministries, such as summer youth activities. Ministries which the committee hopes to add in the future include a child care center and a senior citizens' program.

"This ministry has given me a good foundation," says Williams, who hopes to serve in the same type of work after graduation. "It has given me the opportunity of creative ministry, a chance to find out what I can do and who I am."

Williams has also found encouragement concerning Christian unity.

"This has proven to me," he commented, "that different denominations, holding onto their common belief, can work together for a common cause with good results.... People working on the common ground of Jesus Christ can go a long way."

Church 'Split' Part  
Of Mission Strategy

By Charlie Warren

PETERSBURG, ILL. (BP)--The First Baptist Church in this small agricultural community has split, in a sense, losing several of its key lay leaders, but neither the pastor nor the congregation is the least bit upset about it.

The "split" in fact, was planned as part of the church's mission strategy. The lay people left First Baptist to help start, develop and nurture Baptist missions in the neighboring small towns of Greenview and Athens, both within 15 miles of Petersburg.

The Greenview Baptist Chapel, started in June, 1973, now has a membership of 55, a Sunday School enrollment of about 100 and an average Sunday morning attendance of 60. About 40 people have been baptized in the first four years.

The Baptist Chapel of Athens, which began in August, 1975, now has a membership of 59, a Sunday School enrollment of 110 and an average attendance of 69. Fourteen people have been baptized during the first two years.

While both missions hope to become churches someday, they currently enjoy the support of the mother church in Petersburg.

Located two short blocks from the Petersburg town square, First Baptist Church has grown significantly since Odell Bell became pastor 10 years ago.

"We Baptists used to be in the minority here," Bell said, "but not now. Our average attendance on Sundays is probably the highest of the 14 or 15 churches in Petersburg."

Naturally, Bell hopes this growth will continue, but he hinted that perhaps the church has just about reached its saturation point for bringing in new members from within Petersburg.

"We (First Baptist) will grow some," he said, "but our most significant work will be in starting missions. I believe that's the most important thing we can do."

Petersburg, situated in a stretch of rich and fertile farmland north of Springfield, is not a likely place for a West Tennessee preacher to settle, but Bell believes God sent him here.

A native of Trimble, Tenn., a small town north of Memphis, Bell attended Union University in Jackson, Tenn. He says his call to Illinois came through a pastor friend who encouraged him to serve as pastor of a small mission church in Rome, Ill.

Bell stayed with the Rome congregation until it became a church and built a building. Then he accepted the call from the Petersburg church.

Although perhaps the most significant growth in the church's 123-year history has occurred since Bell came, it's the stories of the two missions that really point to his strong leadership. Somehow he has motivated his lay people to get involved in starting new work. And he's not threatened by the loss of a few key leaders of the mother church nor by the fact that the two missions baptized more people last year than the mother church.

"Now it's true that the Lord will call away your most faithful leaders, but He'll also provide others to take their place," Bell said. "It's worth giving up these 15 or 20 faithful

members on Sundays to have 140 or 150 who are studying the Bible and worshipping in these missions.

"Our purpose really is to build up the body of Christ whether it's in this building or wherever it might be."

"If you can get people into mission situations, there's a sense of accomplishment," Bell continued. "They feel their lives are being more useful than when they were in a church that's already well established."

Bell pointed out two major obstacles to starting new work--leadership and money.

"People hesitated," Bell noted. "It was purely a faith venture. The people were for it, but they wanted to wait until they had the money and qualified leaders. Some resented losing leaders of the mother church."

After Bell preached some sermons designed to challenge people to start new work, the leaders emerged, although most will admit they responded reluctantly.

The money came too, even though at times everyone wondered where it would come from.

Now Bell and several laymen are talking about the possibilities of starting other missions. If these two missions have ministered to so many with so few obstacles, then why not reach out to other areas? they ask.

And Bell would encourage others to "go thou and do likewise."

"I don't think there's a church anywhere with faithful people that couldn't start a mission if they step out in faith and do it," he concluded. "God will provide."