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Montana "Pioneer"
Churches Struggling

By Walker L. Knight

CIRCLE, Mont. (BP)--Southern Baptists may be big nationally, but in the eastern half of Montana, an area of 73,000 square miles of mountains, ranches and farms, the 12.9 million member denomination is a distinct minority.

For this reason and some others, the constituting of the Circle Baptist Church in Circle--county seat of McCone County--became an occasion of some note, despite the fact that the church has only 24 members, no property and a pastor who has been on the field only a few months.

The importance of the event was underscored by visitors from Nashville, Tenn., Atlanta, Ga., Billings, Mont., and other towns with Baptist churches in this half of the state.

Churches are hard for Southern Baptists to come by in these parts. In all of the 73,000 square miles, there are only three associations, representing 18 churches, plus seven church-type missions. These also include two churches on the Northern Cheyenne and the Fort Peck Indian Reservations which are led by missionary couples.

The 25 congregations, by anyone's standards, are small. A church with 100 in Sunday School is medium sized here. Communities in Montana--where ranches are measured in sections (640 acres to a section) rather than acres--are small.

Statistically, Southern Baptists represent only one percent of the 694,000 population of the state. Baptists of all affiliations comprise only three percent of the population.

According to the Southern Baptist Evangelism Index, prepared by the denomination's Home Mission Board, some 51 percent of the people of Montana claim adherence to some church, but Catholics and other non-evangelicals represent almost half of that figure.

While small, Southern Baptists are not exactly new to the area. Some 25 years ago, the first Southern Baptist churches were started when military and oil field personnel migrated to the area from states where Southern Baptists are strong.

However, during the 25 years, the churches often failed to reach longtime or native residents. When the military and oil field people left, the churches died or hung on with a few hardy members. Some churches started or restarted as often as three times.

Circle Church, sponsored by First Baptist Church of Wolf Point, 50 miles to the north, started a little more than a year ago when members of the mother church moved here. A Bible study was formed in an apartment and eventually the Masonic Lodge basement was rented.

Keeping the Circle group strong proved difficult, and when Ray Willis was invited to come in view of a call, only one member showed up for the service. Others were contacted by telephone, and he accepted, encouraged by the fact two adults came on profession of faith and one on promise of a letter during the service.

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Willis, a native of Illinois, graduated from seminary in June, and since moving to Circle in July has had professions or additions to the mission nearly every Sunday. The Sunday after the church was constituted, five persons presented themselves for baptism and three more came by letter.

The week following constitution, the church bought property and made plans to build. So far, high attendance has been 55 persons.

Circle's future is bright, much brighter than for many of the small towns in Montana. It sits astride one of the largest coal deposits in the nation and construction is under way for an industry that will mine the coal for fuel and will manufacture fertilizer. Nearly 3,000 new residents are on the way. It will triple the current population of 1,100.

Area director of missions W. J. Hughes, a six-foot, six-inch giant whose boots and Stetson hat make him appear seven-feet tall, cites half a dozen places in eastern Montana which are responding to the hard work and vision of men such as Willis.

At Glasgow, where Calvary Baptist struggled just to stay alive after the Air Force base closed, Pastor Bob Walker has led the way to new life. A retired Air Force sergeant at the base, Walker had only 12 persons in his congregation on his first Sunday. Now, more than 100 attend as the church continues to grow.

Growth, he says, comes by one-on-one evangelism.

Walker's plain speaking and aggressiveness has alienated some of the town: "They call us fanatics and this Holy Hill," he said. The church has a bus, an active puppet ministry, services at the air base property where a small town is building.

At Forsyth, a recent revival at First Baptist Church resulted in an almost unheard of 38 conversions, and Pastor Jerry Davis in his first year has people so inspired they visit with him at the farms and ranches all over the county.

At First Baptist Church of Woolf Point, Pastor Ray Self is building a congregation of native and longtime residents. On the Sunday following the constituting of Circle Church, Woolf Point baptized a young medical doctor serving with the Public Health Service.

Terry Buford serves in Opheim, 10 miles from the Canadian border. He volunteered to work during the summer, but now sees the church as God's place for him at the moment. A 25-year-old bachelor, Buford is better equipped to weather the financial strain such small situations place on ministers.

Church members feed him, house him and the congregation extends some finances. Another mission at Scobey provides support from a church in Mississippi. Buford also receives funds from friends in Arkansas and Tennessee.

For every success there's a failure. Hughes said that of 10 pastors who came to eastern Montana last year, five left within a year. Mission dollars keep those who stay alive. The funds come from the state, the Home Mission Board or from churches who support these missions and small churches directly. Churches in Montana are affiliated with the Northern Plains Baptist Convention, which also covers Southern Baptist work in three additional states--North and South Dakota and Wyoming.

The pastors who do come to stay see their fields in much the same way as foreign missionaries, expecting little rapid growth and long periods of building acceptance and gaining conversions.

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Professor Affirms Authority,
 Inspiration of Scripture

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--Believing the Bible involves reading and using it, not just cliches, a Southern Baptist seminary professor said here.

Dale Moody, professor of Christian theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., made that observation at a meeting of some 500 deacons, pastors and their wives sponsored by the church administration department of the Illinois Baptist State Association here.

"I do believe in the inspiration of the Bible. I also believe in the authority of the Bible. When you believe in the authority of the Bible, you open it. You try to shape your beliefs and your behavior by what you read," Moody told the group.

Moody chided critics who attack Southern Baptist Convention agencies with accusations of "liberalism."

"I often hear of people saying that up at the seminary the professors don't believe in the inspiration of the Bible. These scandal-mongers...like to tell you what I don't believe. Why don't they tell you what I do believe? What I do believe is everything in this book," Moody exclaimed, holding his Bible aloft.

The seminary professor said that a number of "hair-splitting people" use theories of inspiration of Scripture "to cut anybody's throat who doesn't say it the same way they say it. What I want to do is encourage people to open the Bible and study it and understand it."

Moody cited one man who confronted him with the accusation, "That may be the Bible you're reading to us, but it's not Baptist."

"Now I don't get excited about cliches. They don't excite me," Moody told the Illinois group. "But the opening of Holy Scripture does. I'm willing for us to discover what we've been ignoring. There are fresh things you can get out of the Bible even if you've been teaching it 40 years."

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Hong Kong Major City
 Evangelism Advances

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HONG KONG (BP)--The campaign strategy has been carefully mapped out. Workers have been enlisted and leadership trained. It has the support of the people involved.

Politics? No, the campaign involves major city evangelism and the end result won't be an election, but rather new churches and new believers. Hong Kong is one of at least 12 major urban centers throughout the world involved in various stages in the two-year project aimed at saturating cities with the gospel of Christ.

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A similar campaign is under way in Brazil and others are in the planning stage for five cities in Korea and in metropolitan centers in several other countries.

In Hong Kong, Southern Baptist missionaries, Baptist nationals and volunteers from the United States are working together as the campaign's preparation stage nears completion. Witness Involvement Now (WIN) Schools are being conducted now as part of the effort to train and involve national leadership, according to Joseph B. Underwood, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's consultant on evangelism and church development.

Underwood and his associates coordinate the major city evangelism campaigns with missionaries and national leadership and are responsible for inviting volunteers to participate.

One of Underwood's associates, Ervin E. Hastey, is among those conducting WIN Schools, with assistance from missionaries. "The primary purpose is training Chinese leaders and pastors to continue the work," Underwood said. "Plans include one or more WIN Schools in every church between now and November 1978, when the crusades will be conducted."

Glen A. Brown of Oklahoma is also in Hong Kong working to develop stewardship projects. In January, six churches will be used in pilot projects. Brown, associate director of planning and promotion for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, will be assisted by six other volunteers from Oklahoma.

The Hong Kong campaign is entering the saturation stage, which includes not only personal appearances by special groups and artists, but also the beginning of home Bible studies and several church development activities.

In December, singer Joe Ann Shelton of Fort Worth, Tex., will be in Hong Kong for concerts and various appearances, and a choir from East Park Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., will present programs related to the campaign. A youth Bible conference also is planned for December.

Next March and April, 40 volunteers from Oklahoma and Alabama will conduct stewardship campaigns in 40 local churches, followed in May by a conference on evangelism.

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Baptist Women Elect
President, Hear Challenge

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FREEPORT, Bahamas (BP)--Representatives of the North American Baptist Women's Union (NABWU), meeting here for the group's quinquennial Continental Assembly, elected their first black woman president and heard a battery of speakers challenge them to make their influence felt.

More than 2,300 women from 17 Baptist groups in six nations participated in the sixth continent-wide NABWU, which relates to the Women's Department of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). The NABWU formed in 1951.

Marena Belle (Mrs. John W.) Williams, wife of the pastor of the St. Stephen Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo., an affiliate of the National Baptist Convention of America, was elected president

Other officers are Judith (Mrs. John G.) Clanton, wife of the pastor of First General Baptist Church, Oakland City, Ind., vice president; Florence (Mrs. H. Norman) Korb, an American Baptist from South Dennis, Mass., secretary; and Helen (Mrs. Robert) Fling, promotion associate for work in new areas, Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, treasurer.

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Governmental leaders in the Bahamas joined en masse with Baptist leaders to greet the visitors, including acting governor general, Gerald Cash; minister of youth, sports and community affairs, Kendall Nottage; minister of tourism, Clement Maynard; and Doris Johnson, president of the Bahamas Senate and coordinator of Baptist women's work in the islands.

"Our country has roots in Baptist principles," Nottage declared. "Baptists have been in the forefront of every progressive step of our country. Baptists have shown us that there is no room for hate and selfishness." He paid tribute to Bahamas Baptist women as "pillars of our national strength," noting that women have been in the forefront of the Bahamian civil rights movement.

Johnson, a leader in the Bahamian independence movement and writer of the preamble to the country's constitution which founded it on Christian principles, reminded the visiting Baptists that they would have a major impact on the young country.

"There is one of you for every 100 Bahamians," she said. Some 45,000 Baptists are among the Bahamian population of 200,000. Baptist work, which began in 1790, is organized into the Bahamas Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention. The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (black) began assisting Bahamian Baptists in 1935, and Southern Baptist missionaries entered in 1951.

Dorothy Brown of Nashville, Tenn., first black woman surgeon in the southern United States, told of her personal commitment to replace hatred and resentment of racial prejudice with love.

"Only God has sustained the black woman," she said. "The only abiding answer is God. To blacks, I say, the essence of Christianity is forgiveness. To whites, I say, forgiveness is resolute, inoffensive, accurate and immediate. There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness. Blacks can rise up and say to white America, I forgive you. Now let's walk together."

Johnson added: "World governments are expecting Christian women to give new leadership in a new economic order." She urged women to champion absolute moral purity in shaping a new world plan.

Evelyn Christenson, an author from St. Paul, Minn., said a "hunger and thirst after righteousness" is sweeping the continent. "Millions are praying in an organized way," she said. "It is a wave from God."

She asked the women to insert a plug into the source of spiritual power through prayer and to motivate others to pray. "Climb down off your pedestal and level with people that you need prayer, not casseroles, aprons, and all the trappings of church women's work," she said.

Pearl Lee McNeil, anthropologist from Dallas, told the women that the family is in danger because marriage is in trouble, and she called for a greater commitment to stable, mature, wholesome family life. "Commitment is more than an arrangement," she declared.

In business sessions, the women heard a report that the 1976 Baptist Women's Day of Prayer, promoted around the world by the BWA Women's Department, resulted in an offering of \$100,208 in North America--double the amount since the NABWU last assembled in 1972. The next Day of Prayer is Nov. 7, 1977. The offering provides operating income for NABWU and makes contributions to Baptist world relief efforts. Fifty-six percent of contributions in North America have been given to the Women's Department for its operations on other continents.

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Mrs. R. L. Mathis, president of the BWA Women's Department and past president of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, presided over a candlelight ceremony for all BWA nations and reported for the women's union of the Southwest Pacific. She said women in Papua, New Guinea, camped on a seashore, prayed all day and made beadwork to sell for an offering.

Mrs. Ruth Velasquez of El Salvador, one of many speakers at the meeting, expressed thanks for BWA relief aid to Latin American countries struck by natural disasters. "We may lack in economic and human resources, but we are your equals in spirit, understanding, and love. We share a future and a hope," she said.

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U. S. Needs Jesus, Not
Nuclear Arms, Hughes Says

By David Wilkinson

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Jesus Christ, not nuclear weaponry, should be America's "first line of defense," former U. S. Senator Harold E. Hughes declared here during the state leadership prayer breakfast sponsored by the Religious Heritage of America.

"Peace will not come about by bringing more and more instruments of destruction into existence," said the former Iowa governor and senator. "We can't keep building bigger and better weapons. Man has always used weapons to kill and destroy. What makes you think we have changed? The only real change is through Jesus Christ, who changes the heart."

Trusting God as a nation's defense "is not a very pleasant thing to think about," Hughes admitted. "But," he added, "I'm totally convinced that if we trust Christ as our first line of defense that death and destruction caused by war will finally come to an end."

The prayer breakfast was one of several events sponsored by the Religious Heritage of America during its annual pilgrimage, held in Nashville for the first time. The national, non-sectarian organization holds as its goal the preservation of the spiritual values proclaimed by America's founding fathers.

Nashville Mayor Richard Fulton, Lieutenant Gov. John Wilder and Tennessee Supreme Court Justice William Harbison participated in the brief program.

Hughes, a recovered alcoholic, stressed that America needs fewer "moral people" and more "committed Christians" if it is to realize its potential as a "nation under God."

The only way to have the inalienable rights sought by the founders of this nation is to find them in Jesus Christ, he said.

"We can pursue them politically, as men have done for centuries, and we can never find them," Hughes explained. "We must never distort or warp the Word of God. If this nation is to be 'under God,' then its people must live under the commandments of God."

"Are we doing that?" he questioned. "Absolutely not."

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Why Do Some Churches
Grow, Others Stagnate?

By Wallace Henley

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BIRMINGHAM (BP)--"Stodgy Hills Baptist Church" hovered on its corner like a sleeping tortoise. But just down the street, "Dynamo Drive Baptist Church" had just razed its kindergarten playground to expand its cramped facilities.

Why do some churches grow while others sit still?

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Hoyt R. Wilson, minister of education at Birmingham's Mountain Brook Baptist Church, may have found some of the answers, through a sabbatical study of stages of church growth.

Wilson surveyed 1,000 Southern Baptist churches to uncover aspects of church growth. He got an unusually high response--52 percent of the churches replied to his questions. They ranged from a 203-year old congregation in Virginia to a young church in Las Vegas.

In all the materials Wilson dispatched, there were 112,316 possible answers. A computer was used to correlate responses.

A church passes through three stages, Wilson found. In the first, a church spends its time recruiting members, battling minor conflicts over the nature of the church, its worship and facilities, while pulling together through the need to find new members and raise money. Enthusiasm and strong unity are a trademark.

A church in the second stage feels it must grow larger to accomplish its goals. But it's easier for leaders to name the year when the building was completed than to cite three contributions to ministry in the last year. Enthusiasm lags and capital improvements have left little money for program budgets.

By stage three, much conflict arises over the nature and goals of the church. Members wonder what the church is supposed to do now that it's established. A small minority begins criticizing the pastor, while the "oldtimers" resist a larger membership and complex programming because they want to cling to the memories of being "one big family." The leaders lose enthusiasm, and the intimacy of the group is lost.

Growing churches, found Wilson, set growth by clearly defined purpose and goals, meeting people's needs and involving members widely in ministries of the church.

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Wallace Henley is religion editor of the Birmingham News

Missionary Seriously Ill,
Hospitalized in New York

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NEW YORK (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary, C. Ernest Harvey, is in serious condition here after being stricken with encephalitis in Portugal.

Harvey, who serves with his wife, Jan, in general evangelism work in southern Portugal, had headaches and fever for several days and became ill with convulsions, Oct. 18. He lost consciousness soon afterward.

He was taken to Lisbon, Portugal, Oct. 21, and flown to St. Luke's Hospital in New York, Oct. 23. The diagnosis of encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain, was not made until his arrival in New York. He has drifted in and out consciousness and has shown limited response to family members but remains in very serious condition, according to Franklin T. Fowler, medical consultant for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond.

Fowler and J.D. Hughey, the board's secretary for the area in which the Harveys serve as missionaries, flew to New York to meet Harvey, his wife, two grown children and other relatives. Harvey is from Jacksonville, Fla., and his wife is from Alva and Ft. Myers, Fla.

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