



January 17, 1978

78-6

Rural Baptist Church
Makes Proud Stand

By Norman Jameson

TILLEDA, WIS., (BP)--Perched proudly on a hill commanding a miles long view of the main highway across northern Wisconsin, stands a proud old church built by German Lutherans in 1912. German words are inscribed on huge stained glass windows that color the drifts of sparkling snow fallen around.

The church housed Methodists after the Lutherans moved out, then was an artist's studio. Now, with its spire still majestically reaching into the air, it is the only house of worship for Southern Baptists living in a 5,000 square mile area around it.

Its members will "treat you so many ways you're bound to like some of them," says pastor Thurman Brown, a Louisiana preacher who came to Wisconsin to do missions work, then "got so poor I couldn't leave." Brown is proud to say that he leads the largest rural Southern Baptist church in Wisconsin, before adding, in a slightly softer voice, that it's the only such church.

Brown, 54, lives 52 miles east of the church, in Green Bay, where he is a general inspector for National Can Corp. He and his wife Doris drive to Tilleda each Saturday morning to conduct a vigorous day of visiting prospective members and stay on Saturday nights in a trailer behind the church, that until the summer of 1976, had no plumbing.

Brown has a voice that could carry the entire bass section of any choir and a laugh that threatens the security of nearby windows. Dressed in a pinstripe suit, wearing an open necked shirt and cowboy boots, he tells of Bethany Baptist's current situation.

It was constituted as a church in 1969 after several years as a mission of Calvary Baptist Church in Schofield, Wis.--a church that Brown helped start when he was chairman of the missions committee at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Green Bay. Bethany struggled through three pastors and in December 1975 voted to disband.

Then in February 1976, Brown was asked if he wanted a real challenge and when he accepted, he was given a list of names and addresses of former members of Bethany. He and Doris started working to fan the coals of a fire that once burned.

Up here where only fencerows and telephone lines connect one farm with another, finding a family from the simple address "Route 2, Tigerton" could prove a task within the capabilities of only the postman. But on Saturdays the Browns would drive around the neighboring towns, digging up old members and visiting prospective ones. They have since had as many as 41 people at Sunday services.

The tiny town of Tilleda, only a couple hundred in population, is the hub town of a half dozen other little towns whose businesses serve the dairy farmers in the area. Farmers' evening chores make the night service at Bethany a sporadic event at best.

The weather also does its best to convince the faint hearted it would be best to stay home during the winter. But Brown says his members are faithful. He turned on the old furnace one Saturday when it was 20 degrees below zero. It lugged all night long but only got the temperature in the church up to 38 degrees by the time of the Sunday service. But not one of the regular attenders stayed home and the service was held in the Browns' trailer behind the church.

-more-

At other times the snow has been so deep that a snowblower would have to be shoved into the deep blanket of white stuff to blow out the bottom half of the drift, then pulled back so the top half could fall to the ground, where it could be caught by the blower. Still, the Browns have never missed a service.

Skepticism stemming from the church's previous instability has become an obstacle that Brown must overcome, and that's proving more difficult than even the weather and the distances involved.

"Up here, you've strictly got to prove yourself before you can do anything," Brown says. "You have to prove you mean business, that you're going to stay." Sunday School teacher Mary Pevonka, herself a native of Virginia who married a Wisconsin farmer while he was in the service said, "Once they know you, they like you. But until you grow on them, you're an outsider."

Barbara Erickson, church clerk, who recently moved to the area when her husband retired from the Air Force, said one reason they are considered outsiders is because they live differently. She said they and their children are considered strange among their Bohemian and German friends because they don't drink or smoke.

The church is not flourishing. But in character with its members and the farm families it hopes to attract, it is sinking roots through rocky soil, scratching out an existence from the seemingly barren countryside. Two Texas summer work groups have greatly increased the church's exposure in the surrounding communities and made some vital renovations on the building.

Brown's reception in area homes has always been warm but the response has been cool. Still, he is sure the prospects for a fruitful church are great. "I don't have the answer," he says, eyes attached to the rim of his coffee cup. "What I think is that some of them are waiting for more proof we mean business."

Brown, whose normal hours at National Can are 3:30 p.m. until midnight, says he would like nothing better than to be on the field full time, "but I make no apologies for having to work." Bethany pays him \$75 salary a month and the Minnesota-Wisconsin Fellowship contributes \$90 travel money per month.

The hardships of their initial ministry--when the trailer was in a nearby park and when they had to carry 10 gallons of water with them every week from Green Bay because there was no plumbing, and the weather, the miles and the strange area--have served only to heighten the joy the Browns find here.

"Personally, I have gained a far greater blessing than all the members have," Brown says. "I suppose it's been because I've really been digging in." And he's sure the rural church fills a niche that won't let it disappear.

"There's a closeness you just don't find everywhere," he explains. "If I have a problem, it's your problem and if you have one, it's mine. If you have a joy I shout with you.

"If a lot of larger churches experienced the spirit in worship we've experienced, their walls would break because people would be in there. It feels so close sometimes you can reach out and touch it."

The church steeple, which can be seen nearly five miles when approaching it from the east, will soon be lighted--to proclaim from the hilltop that despite a struggle, the light of this Baptist church will not be hidden.



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355

W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2000
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

January 17, 1978

78-6

Indonesians, Missionaries
See New Day of Cooperation

SEMARANG, Indonesia (BP)--After more than six years of strained relations, Indonesian Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries are experiencing a renewed spirit of cooperation and are making strides toward better working relationships.

Decisions made at the Association of Indonesian Baptist Churches' triennial congress, held in late 1977, herald what the newly elected chairman of the association calls "a new day."

"We are laying here new foundations," said Pak Wim Theorupun, the Baptist layman and federal attorney from eastern Indonesia who was elected chairman of the association. "We will forget the past and the negative factors of it. We will show Indonesia what Baptists can do, led of God, in unity."

These words, reported in a newsletter to Southern Baptists' 117 missionaries assigned to Indonesia, gave grounds for optimism about the future of Baptist work in this Southeast Asian country. For the past six years, relationships between missionaries and many national Baptist leaders have been disrupted by disagreement over the best way to develop Baptist churches that can thrive in the Indonesian culture.

The rupture in relationships began in 1971 after the Indonesian Baptist Mission, the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries, voted to phase out direct financial aid to Indonesian churches and to shift from residential theological training on the seminary campus in Semarang to an extension program.

The policy changes were made at the missionary's annual meeting after a mission growth survey raised serious questions about the patterns being used in starting churches. Such patterns, dependent on heavy financial subsidy, seemed to offer little possibility for winning Indonesia's 110 million unsaved people to Christ.

The Mission moved from training in a residential seminary to a type of training (theological education by extension) which had the potential of providing many local leaders by training them where they lived. This change in emphasis was designed to accompany the development of large numbers of small rural churches.

But a lack of understanding resulted, and relations with Indonesian church leaders gradually worsened until in 1975 the executive committee of the union voted to "freeze" all cooperation with the mission.

Much prayer and careful work has gone into attempts to mend these relationships, according to Mission Chairman Edward O. Sanders, and the fruit of these efforts came at the triennial congress held in this central Java city in November.

At that time, the congress, meeting with the theme "That They May All Be One," voted overwhelmingly to renew cooperative ties with the Indonesian Baptist Mission, according to Sanders and William N. McElrath, missionary press representative.

In other action, the congress voted, as it had in 1973, to uphold historic Baptist doctrinal views. But the group decided to give a less binding title to the doctrinal statement, making it "Guide to Basic Beliefs of Indonesian Baptists" instead of the previous title, "Doctrines of Indonesian Baptists."

-more-

During the congress the 135 messengers also voted for a record budget goal of 135 million rupiahs (about \$108,500 annually) over the next three years. Part of these funds were earmarked to expand mission efforts, McElrath reported.

"I am extremely pleased with the results of the congress," said William R. Wakefield, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Southeast Asia. "Meetings held previous to the congress and confirmed by the congress have resulted in a decision to work together as a mission and a convention in a unified program of theological education, mass communications and publications."

Missionary J. Marvin Leech, one of the missionaries attending the congress, said that a unified program of theological education will begin in 1979. After the residential program of the seminary was closed, the Indonesian Baptists had established the Indonesian Baptist Theological Academy. At the congress, it was voted to move the academy to the campus at Semarang and to continue the extension theological education program.

Although details of cooperation will need to be worked out over the next few weeks and months, the present spirit of unity provides encouragement regarding the future of the work in Indonesia, Wakefield said.

"Continued prayer is needed," he emphasized, "as the details of the working agreements are worked out with the convention."

-30-

Baptist Assembly Grounds
Damaged in Japan Earthquake

Baptist Press
1/17/78

SHIZUOKA, Japan (BP)--Amagi Sanso, the Japan Baptist assembly grounds located here on the Izu Peninsula just south of Tokyo, suffered damage in an earthquake which hit Japan about noon Jan. 14.

No deaths or injuries were reported at the assembly, according to Lois (Mrs. Charles L.) Whaley, Southern Baptist missionary press representative. The staff had just begun celebrating a three-day national holiday and there was no conference in session at the time.

Damage to buildings is estimated at \$25,630, according to Shigeyoshi Suzuki, treasurer of the Japan Baptist Convention. But total loss will be thousands of dollars higher because of income lost due to future cancellations.

Hiroshi Yoshioka, manager of Amagi, says that the tile roof over the small chapel fell, walls crumbled, and windows, dishes and kitchen equipment were broken.

Amagi has been in operation since the mid-1950s and is "one of the finest retreat centers in Japan," according to George H. Hays, East Asia secretary for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The center is owned and operated by the Japan Baptist Convention.

It was reported that the earthquake, which registered seven on the Richter scale, shook the entire chain of Japanese islands and was followed by more than 100 tremors of diminishing magnitude. These were expected to continue for about two weeks.

-30-