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Baptists Tour Cleveland For Bold Mission Thrust

CLEVELAND, Ohio (BP)--A charter-bus load of Southern Baptists toured Cleveland to get an up-close look at a "key city" in Bold Mission Thrust, Southern Baptist plan to evangelize and congregationalize the nation and the world in this century.

About 40 representatives of 13 of the 28 Southern Baptist congregations in the Greater Cleveland Baptist Association and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board logged 100 miles in five hours. The tour, organized by the Bold Mission Thrust Task Force of the association, was designed to give local Baptists views of the inner city and suburbs not seen by most.

Cleveland is one of several phase two Bold Mission Thrust cities selected by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board as needing particular attention because of the high number of unevangelized persons and low number of Southern Baptist congregations.

In a clockwise loop through residential and manufacturing areas of the city and suburbs, the group glimpsed physical evidence of the city's statistics.

The participants expressed amazement at the size--nearly 50 miles across from east to west--of the city as well as the squalid conditions of some communities.

Of the 24 different ethnic groups in the metropolitan area of three million people, Southern Baptists minister to only five.

Of the 1,420 churches in Cleveland and its suburbs, Southern Baptists--in the area for just over 20 years--count only 23 constituted churches and five other congregations, with a total membership of 5,381 as of Sept. 30, 1977. Other denominations, such as Lutherans and Brethren, have as many as 350 churches.

Within the city limits of Cleveland, Southern Baptists have only two churches--one with white membership, one mostly black. The black congregation has been unable to maintain loan payments on its building and soon may have the loan called.

As part of the North Central States Mission Thrust, the association plans to double Baptist churches in the area by 1990, according to John Tollison, director of associational missions. Yet, the needs seem overwhelming when compared with the strength of Southern Baptists in the city.

Cleveland is typical of many cities. One block contrasts with the next; poverty borders affluence. Exclusive high-rise apartments along the gold coast of Lake Erie contrast with the Italian community of Murray Hill.

Although pastors attempt to penetrate the apartments, where many Cleveland Browns football team members live, complex regulations restrict entrance to "residents or their guests." With rents of \$600 or higher, the association and churches struggling already for funds, cannot afford to place a worker inside the complex, Tollison reported.

Yet, he said, thousands of persons living within just a few hundred feet of each other could be a fertile mission fields.

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The Arab Chapel attempts to minister to the estimated 20,000 Arabs in the city. But without funding, the chapel will soon close its doors.

There's no Baptist ministry to the 100,000 Czechoslovakians in the city.

Bill Maupin, mission pastor at the Brecksville Chapel and chairman of the Bold Mission Thrust fact-finding task force, said, "because of this tour, we hope these needs that we all know, may become more real to us."

After the tour and recommendations for priority items of ministry, Dale Cross, Bold Mission Thrust consultant for Cleveland from the Home Mission Board's evangelism staff, and the associational members will meet to set goals and objectives.

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UN Expert: World Drug
Traffic More Stable

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The international drug scene appears to have stabilized, a United Nations expert told the Council of Washington Representatives on the United Nations Council of Organizations.

Alexander Messing-Mierzejewski, chief of the representation and liaison unit of the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-Ordination of the UN, said that drug problems are far from solved but they do not seem to be increasing significantly around the world.

"Western Europe has been affected by heroin," Messing-Mierzejewski said, "and traditional drug use in Asia is unabated but there was no great spill from Vietnam as had been feared."

The narcotics expert noted that when police stop the movement of drugs through one port, such as Marseilles, the traffic simply moves to Amsterdam, Lisbon, or another city. The same is true of drug production and growing, he said.

Messing-Mierzejewski noted three areas for action in controlling drugs around the world-- control the growth and production of addictive materials, reduce demand, and stop the movement between consumer and producer.

He put the responsibility for reducing demand on religious and civic groups, while acknowledging that the other two objectives can best be accomplished by government. He also paid tribute to the part religious groups have played in increasing governmental cooperation in fighting drug abuse internationally.

"We need better rehabilitation," Messing-Mierzejewski said. "It is your responsibility to see that there are fewer mouths or veins open to these poisons."

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Midwestern Trustees Set
Budget, Focus on Renovation

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The board of trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary adopted a record budget, elected officers, focused on campus renovation and long range planning, and approved a new faculty position.

The approved budget of \$1.6 million for fiscal 1978-79 represents a 19 percent increase over the current figure. New faculty and growing staff account for the major portions of the increase.

James Tharp, businessman from Springfield, Mo., was elected trustee president. Other officers are William Hartley, pastor of Ridgcrest Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., first vice president; David Stone, second vice president, and Edward VanDeusen, treasurer, both Kansas City area businessmen; and Paul Batson, pastor from South Carolina, secretary.

Giving final approval to the restoration and renovation plans for Midwestern's single student residence hall, the board authorized immediate action on the project and anticipate completion by August of this year.

In other action, the trustees authorized the preparation and completion of a new master plan, to be brought to the board at their October, 1978, meeting, and to be put into action by the following spring.

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The board also approved a new faculty position in the area of Christian Ethics and voted on a professor who will be announced the first of June.

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Professor Believes Strong
Chinese Christians in U. S.

Baptist Press
4/17/78

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--A prominent author of Chinese Christian literature believes the cream of all Chinese Christians in the world is now living in the United States.

"If we can mobilize these Christians in America they will assert a great influence not only upon the churches back in Asia and China, but will have an impact on the Christian movement in North America," says Samuel Y. C. Tang, associate professor of Old Testament interpretation and Hebrew at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

Tang says mission work in China before communists took power in 1950 was oriented more toward social ministries than in building a strong church. "But after the communist takeover when they were forced out of mainland China to Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Southeast Asian countries, the missionaries began exerting more power toward training leadership in the Christian movement, and the church became very strong," he says.

Tang, former president of the Hong Kong Baptist Seminary, says overpopulation and unstable political conditions in Southeast Asia and acute competition for education has caused large numbers of Chinese to immigrate to the United States. He says there are only two universities to serve Hong Kong's four million people.

"In order to go to school, many Christian young people who are very smart and have high aspirations are coming to America. And even when they finish their education and can go back, they know their opportunities will be greater here, so they stay and become even stronger Christians," he says.

"When I say that the cream of the Chinese Christians are in America," he explains, "it is because there are as many Chinese students at seminaries in America comparable to students in all the seminaries in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan."

Tang says there is hope among the Chinese Christian young people that "the door of mainland China will be opened again, so they can go home to that country by groups to preach the gospel." Tang, however, plans to remain in America to continue to minister to the Chinese congregations in this country, where he sees himself as both teacher and student.

"The Chinese population in America is so diverse. There are traditionalists, neo-traditionalists, and modernists here. I try to study all their cultural and social changes so I can be a better minister and a better voice in the church. Hopefully through my writing and speaking, the people can gain some kind of fusion or unity out of the diversity," he says. Tang has written 18 books for Bible study and on other religion topics.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers by Golden Gate Seminary.

Godzilla Saturday Night
But God Sunday Morning

By Elaine Furlow

BIG BEAR CITY, Calif. (BP)--On Sunday morning a handful of Southern Baptists and visitors gathered for worship at the Big Bear Theater where Godzilla met Tarzan Saturday night.

Preschoolers met by the popcorn machine, older children's Sunday School class gathered across from the ticket window. Later, pastor David Meacham preached to about 40 persons.

Preaching in a rented movie theater--even to a small crowd--is an improvement from two years ago when Meacham and his wife, Sue, first arrived in the town. "We had no leads, no prospects, no nothing," he recalled.

The Meachams have started to work in the seven towns surrounding Big Bear Lake, a seven-mile stretch of sparkling water filled with bass and trout that's on the verge of explosive growth.

The Big Bear Valley area, set in the San Bernardino Mountains, attracts thousands of tourists to its lakes and forests. Snow Summit, the biggest ski area in southern California, is nearby.

About 10,000 persons live here year-round. On weekends and holidays, tourists may push the population to 130,000. During the summer it remains about 90,000.

Meacham estimates 80 percent of the local residents are not members of any church. To open doors to both Christianity and a new Southern Baptist chapel, the Meachams began a weekly 10-minute radio program, "Faith in Action."

They pay \$1 per minute air time: "For that price, you can't beat the \$10 we spend. I speak to more people this way than I ever would in a church building," said Meacham, a TV/film major in college, whose early ambition was to be a country and western disc jockey.

Each radio program ends with an invitation to attend worship in the movie theater, rented for \$25 a week. The program familiarizes the community with the ministry. "When I knock on their doors, now, people don't say, 'You're who?' They say 'Oh yeah, I heard you on the radio.'"

Meacham, 6-6, plays basketball with the local lumberyard team, belongs to the Optimist club and is a volunteer chaplain at the local hospital where Mrs. Meacham is a nurse in coronary care. A doctor at the hospital owns the movie theater.

Meacham's work is two-fold. Besides developing a chapel to reach local people, he plans resort ministries for visitors. The town includes 26 campgrounds. He uses summer missionaries and youth groups to present puppet shows, Bible studies, musical events.

Because some campgrounds, especially government-sponsored, have restrictions, Meacham visits the private parks, setting up camp alongside the visitors.

In winter he skis, meeting tourists on the slopes and giving Bibles and tracts to employees of the ski lift and lodges. "It's more a 'ministry of presence'--their knowing you are there," he said.

Beginning resort ministries and starting churches is as new to Meacham as it is to Big Bear Valley. "Starting a new church was like going to Mars," he admitted.

In addition to the nucleus at Big Bear, he also has started a mission at Crestline which developed quickly. "Bang, bang, bang...a textbook case," he said. "First we had a survey, then community events, like a concert, then a new church rally."

After three weeks as a satellite Sunday School, Crestline was ready for chapel status. It rented a Seventh Day Adventist building to meet in, and now runs a steady 60-70 a week. Two more missions points, at Running Springs and Arrowhead, are on the drawing board.

Meacham, who read a book about the efforts of seven new churches, said, "It really helped me to know other people were out there, too, starting churches like me. You know, in winter, you prepare your sermon, then walk through the snow and preach to only eight people--it can get hard.

"It's good to know there are other people out there working, too."