



-- FEATURES

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78-159

Tiny New Orleans Church
Earns Remarkable Record

By Jim Newton

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Located in the heart of the New Orleans French Quarter, Vieux Carre Baptist Church has achieved a remarkable record in ministering to the needs of people, even though the tiny store-front church has only 17 members on roll.

In recent years, those 17 members have:

...sponsored 142 Cambodian refugees, finding lodging and jobs for most of them;

...led the Louisiana Baptist Convention in per capita Cooperative Program giving two years ago;

...led 59 persons to Christ last year, even though the tiny little church reported no baptisms for the year;

...hosted and sponsored a group of about 40 laymen and seminary students who stayed in the church at night, and did personal witnessing and street preaching during Mardi Gras last year, leading an additional 158 to Christ;

...paid hospital and dental bills exceeding several thousand dollars for a foreign missions volunteer and a nursing student from Kenya...

...and on and on the list could go. How could such a small church do so much with so few resources?

"We don't put our emphasis on nickles and noses," declares Roy Humphrey, pastor of the Vieux Carre church. "We put our emphasis on people."

The pastor draws no salary, only receiving reimbursement for his expenses. Humphrey, a jolly, hulking man who stands six feet tall and weighs 296 pounds, supports himself as a brick and real estate salesman, and owns several rental houses and a masonry contracting firm.

"I work a 22-hour day, but spend more time eating than I do working," he quips.

Humphrey, an outgoing friendly pastor who confesses he has never met a stranger, obviously cares about people.

He jokingly refers to himself as "a big fat man," and doesn't hesitate to tell you he weighs 296 pounds: "and every pound of it is sweet!"

He has strong views about the need for the church to minister to the poor and suffering people in society--"those who can't do anything for you in return."

"A minister has to be interested in poor people more than in building a big church," he declares. "I've been in the ministry for 29 years, and I've never seen a man interested in financial gain for himself I would trust enough to talk to concerning my personal problems."

"One of the things I like about this church is that we don't care if you wear Chanel No. 5, or if you smell like you just walked out of a bar. We want to love you and tell you about Jesus."

Humphrey has a story to tell about almost every person present.

It was Granny, the 84-year-old black Catholic lady, who broke down the barriers that made blacks in the French Quarter feel welcome at Vieux Carre Church.

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"I was walking down the street one day when a big old dog--half German Shepherd and half St. Bernard--about ate me up," Humphrey recalls.

"Granny came out and called off the dog, and I started talking to her. When I invited her to church, she said she couldn't come because she was Catholic." When Humphrey assured her that made no difference, she started coming regularly and has spread the word that blacks are welcome at Vieux Carre Baptist Church.

Shortly after the communist takeover of Vietnam and Laos, the 17-member church sponsored 142 Cambodian refugees, taking money out of their own pockets to rent them a place to stay. Humphrey found many of them jobs, using his contacts in French Quarter hotels. They stayed only a few months, however. Most of them moved en masse to California to join a Cambodian community there.

His is a missions-minded church, Humphrey says. The church has helped pay medical bills for both a mission volunteer, and a product of Baptist missions.

Linda Venus, a New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary student, did volunteer mission work in New Orleans before discovering a malignancy.

Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans allowed her a discount, and members of Vieux Carre Church raised \$2,700 to help pay her medical bills.

"It almost broke our hearts when she died," Humphrey confides. "She was such a beautiful person."

Muthony Mugu, a nursing student from Nairobi, Kenya, who was a product of British Baptist missions work, was "living on oranges" when the church came to her aid financially. Over a period of several years the members raised \$3,400 to pay her tuition at Tulane University and later raised another \$1,600 to help pay for extensive dental work. Now she is back in Kenya, ministering to her own people.

"The finances is nothing but a miracle," says Ted Mortimer, credit manager at the plush Fairmont Hotel who serves as church treasurer. "Nobody believes we can do it, but we do. As the need arises, the money just becomes available."

At one time the church was deeply in debt, with three notes outstanding, but by the end of the year, the 17 members will have paid off all the indebtedness and completed remodeling of the outside facade to make the store-front building look more like a church, Mortimer says.

Usually, there are more visitors than members attending worship services at Vieux Carre. "We reach a lot of street people, win them to the Lord, and send them home," Humphrey explains.

That's why the church could have 59 professions of faith last year, but no baptisms.

"This is a church that loves people," he insists. "And if you don't believe me, just visit with us next time you come to New Orleans."



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Arkansas Group Studies Trends on West Coast

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Feeling that whatever happens on the west coast now will happen in the rest of the nation in the future, 10 faculty and staff members from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas conducted a four-day study of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Using Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary as its base, the interdisciplinary group searched for trends not yet present in the Midwest.

Vester Wolber, one of the leaders of the group, said a mid-summer, nationwide telecast of a documentary on Marin County "caused us to take more interest in the area and study it more carefully before we came."

According to Wolber, chairman of the department of religion at the Arkadelphia school, what the group saw on television they found to be "pretty much true."

"I was personally impressed by the large numbers of sad and defeated people we saw," he reflected, "in spite of all the material wealth they have at their disposal. However, we're also aware of many good things in Marin County, such as our own Golden Gate Seminary," he added. "Its students seem to be happy and committed to their task of study and preparation for the future."

"In fact, we're very pleased with what our Baptist forces are doing in the whole Bay Area now that we realize what they have to go up against."

The contingent met in a morning session with Gerald Adams, feature writer for the San Francisco Examiner, who briefed them on some of San Francisco's history. He also told them about the people of the city and reviewed some of the issues currently being dealt with by city government.

Francis M. Dubose, professor of missions at Golden Gate, led the group on an extensive mission tour of the city, which included viewing the cityscape from Twin Peaks, visiting 19th Avenue Baptist Church in the Sunset District and touring several varying downtown districts.

Wolber said that the study will greatly benefit those who participated and will provide invaluable information that can be used in teaching and counseling students interested in working in the west.

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Sisemore Accepts Post At Shreveport Church

Baptist Press 9/29/78

SHREVEPORT, La. (BP)--John T. Sisemore, director of the Sunday School division of the Baptist General Convention of Texas since 1972, will become director of the program division of First Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., Oct. 15.

He succeeds Ellis M. Bush, who resigned in April to become executive secretary and editor for the Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptist Convention, according to William E. Hull, pastor of the church.

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Prior to his present position, Sisemore, 65, served for 15 years at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, where he headed adult Sunday School work; seven years as director of religious education for the Northwest Baptist Convention; and 16 years as minister of education, administration and music in Texas Baptist churches.

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CORRECTION:

In BP story 9/27/78, entitled "Psychiatry as Religion, Said Dangerous, Idolatrous," graph three, line one, please change "Menninger Clinic in Kansas City" to "Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Ks. "

Thanks, Baptist Press



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