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Alcoholism: The
Silent Conspiracy

By Elaine Furlow

They found Bud lying on the sofa in a pool of blood. The ambulance came and took him away. He died before midnight. He was 58. His bleeding resulted from cirrhosis of the liver. "It's common among alcoholics," the doctor said. "I didn't know Bud was an alcoholic," said a neighbor. "He was such a nice, gentle man." "Oh, you knew. We all knew," said the man's wife. "We just never did anything about it."

Alcoholism is the United States' number three health problem, behind cancer and heart disease.

The National Council on Alcoholism (NCA) estimates at least 10 million Americans are alcoholics. For each alcoholic, NCA estimates four other persons are directly affected.

Southern Baptists, who traditionally frown on even limited social drinking, are not immune to this national problem costing billions of dollars and creating thousands of disrupted, ruined lives.

A 1977 survey of teenagers attending Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center found 46.1 percent of the respondents knew a family member--mother, sibling, grandparent--with a drinking problem.

A similar survey of Woman's Missionary Union workers revealed 63.6 percent knew a family member with a drinking problem; 37.6 percent knew members of their churches with drinking problems.

Experts--Baptists and others--say it won't help to pretend there's no problem. Alcoholics often are surrounded by friends and family who do more harm than good in the "conspiracy of silence": the 7-year-old daughter doesn't mention it to her schoolmates; the wife picks up bounced checks and makes them good; the co-worker punches in for his buddy one more time.

"The number one problem in dealing with addiction is denial (of the problem's existence)," says Wade Hopkin, chief therapist at Ridgeview Institute, Smyrna, Ga. To break through, counselors use "tough love." Tough love attacks the disease, not the person.

"We used to think a guy had to hit bottom before he could be helped," says Hopkin. "But we know there are two areas a guy will fight for--one is his job, the other is relations with his spouse. When people on the job and the family both say, 'We're not going to allow this anymore--you need help,' you can start there."

For tough love to work, it takes the combined effort of everyone around the alcoholic. Some pastors have a helpless, uneasy, even scornful feeling, based on faulty understanding of alcoholism. They can recite stories of telephone calls for help at all hours; alcoholics who used them once too often; frustrating counseling situations. Some confusion comes from an unclear definition of alcoholism, its causes and cures.

When the drinker's daily life is controlled by alcohol, the person is an alcoholic. Says a recovering alcoholic, with a bitter laugh, "I really knew I was in trouble when I found myself thinking, 'This job is interfering with my drinking'--not the other way around."

The alcoholic's physical and emotional make-up differs from that of people who do not develop the disease. Some workers in the alcoholism field compare the disease to diabetes, where hereditary factors make one person more susceptible. Yet predisposition is only a partial cause. Push-pull demands of one's environment, psychological empty spaces in a person's life--these, too, contribute.

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A former pastor now running a rehabilitation camp for alcoholics in Florida argues, "The medical and government approach is that alcoholism is a disease, and that's true in that it's irreversible. But alcoholism is a lifestyle, a coming short of the glory of God. It's the opposite of walking in the spirit. Something is missing."

To recognize alcoholism as a disease does not relieve a person of responsibility for his or her condition. It does, however, enable alcoholics to regain their self-esteem, yet seek medical help.

Too, a Christian sensitive to alcoholics' medical needs will not fall into the trap of thinking love and understanding alone can work a cure. "That's how the alcoholic gets to the Christian. He says, 'If you love me, you will nurture me--me and my vomit, me and my dependency,'" says Ridgeview's Hopkin.

Hopkin urges people not to "buy into" that revolving-door pattern, for caretaking only runs a dreary, hopeless cycle. Because an alcoholic can drain a minister's time and energy, one counselor advocates bringing in agencies equipped to help, while continuing to counsel the alcoholic's family.

To effect a lasting cure, many alcoholics join with people who understand. Among the most successful groups is A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous), with more than one million members.

Many churches have opened their facilities to A.A. meetings. But the decision needs to be a total church commitment.

One Baptist church in Memphis allowed A.A. to use its basement, then balked when church members learned about "all that cigarette smoke and all those butts" in the room. (Recovering alcoholics do seem to drink coffee and to smoke in inordinate amounts. But lately, no-smoking A.A. groups have sprung up.)

Churches can also help through education. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's Christian Social Ministries Department sponsors awareness conferences.

Awareness and education are especially needed for young people--the younger the better. The softer approach may be more effective than traditional hardline attitudes--"Thou shalt not"--toward alcohol consumption. Two studies indicate anti-alcohol religious groups produce more alcoholics among their drinking members than do other denominations.

While not as many Baptists as Catholics or Lutherans drink, from every 100 drinking Baptists come more alcoholics than from 100 drinkers of any group studied.

Many people believe Christians have "something special to offer" in relating to alcoholics--the message of hope for the human condition, the potential for rebirth. Christians, unfortunately, aren't always able to translate into action that message of hope.

"The institutional church is not relevant to the man on the street," says a Florida man. "The bar is more relevant. For the price of a beer, someone will listen to you. But the church doesn't attract lonely people. Instead, it repels them. They don't feel comfortable."

"The biggest job we have," says the Home Mission Board's Harold Wilcox of the Christian Social Ministries Department, "is changing the attitude of the minister and the congregation. When this attitude is changed from one of condemnation to one of love and care, the alcoholic can be helped."



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Nevada Area Baptist
Convention Formed

By Don Hepburn

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--The Nevada Area Baptist Convention was formed here as the 34th state convention to affiliate with the Southern Baptists. The 34 conventions cover Southern Baptist work in all 50 states.

The formation of the new convention, voted at Redrock Baptist Church, Las Vegas, Oct. 17, 1978, took place during "Southern Baptist Week," proclaimed by Nevada Gov. Mike O'Callahan. It came 30 years to the week after the first Southern Baptist church was organized in the state.

Seventy-five churches and missions representing nearly 14,000 members will comprise the new convention. Previously Nevada Southern Baptists in the southern part of the state were attached to the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention and those in the northern half of the state cooperated with the Southern Baptist General Convention of California.

Nearly 300 messengers approved appointment of an executive director, voted a \$376,000 budget, elected officers, and decided on Reno, Nev., as the convention headquarters site.

Ernest B. Myers, 53, of Phoenix, Ariz., was presented as the convention's first executive director by a personnel committee headed by Don Mulkey, pastor, Twin Lakes Baptist Church, Las Vegas.

Myers, now director of assembly development for the Arizona convention, expects to assume leadership of the Nevada convention on Jan 1, 1979, when the convention officially begins operating. He will rent office space in Reno and eventually hopes to secure property for a state convention headquarters.

Messengers accepted with little debate a proposed \$376,206 operating budget. The first budget earmarks 10 percent of receipts from churches or \$13,500 to go toward the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

The budget will fund the new executive director, continue the employment of three area missionaries, provide a variety of services to local churches and eventually fund a state Baptist newspaper.

Income for the young convention will come from a variety of sources, including contributors from Nevada Area churches; support available for new conventions from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Sunday School Board and Brotherhood Commission; and initial gifts from the Arizona and California conventions.

During consideration of a proposed constitution, a mild debate centered around the official name for the convention. Messengers asked why the word "area" was included in the name.

They learned that although Nevada is hemmed in on four sides by organized Southern Baptist state conventions, about six churches within the borders of California, Idaho and Utah will affiliate with Nevada.

After considerable discussion and two near evenly split (voice and standing) votes, the group accepted the name The Nevada Area Baptist Convention of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The messengers elected two men, who had worked hard in the formation of the convention, as their first officers. A. Rudy Duett, pastor, First Southern Baptist Church, Reno, was elected president. Tom Bacon, pastor, First Southern Baptist Church, Hawthorne, was elected vice-president.

Duett had been serving as moderator of the Nevada Baptist Fellowship. He also provided leadership during the past two years assisting committees appointed to establish the new convention.

During a session to hear greetings from sister state conventions, the messengers were surprised with gifts totaling over \$26,000.

Roy Sutton, executive director of the Arizona convention, presented a check for \$11,250. He said it represented proceeds from a memorial fund established by Mr. and Mrs. James Bridges. The fund stipulated that the money was to go to the Nevada convention should it ever form.

Sutton also reported that proceeds from the Arizona state missions offering would be turned over to the Nevada convention. The total amount is not known as gifts are still being received, Sutton noted.

Robert Hughes, executive secretary-treasurer for the California convention, reported his convention will vote in November on a proposal to give Nevada Baptists proceeds from two sources. An initial grant of \$11,125 represents overages in the 1976 and 1977 California state mission offering. The second proposal calls for a special Nevada love offering to be held in February.

Robert Lee, executive for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, presented a check for \$2,000. He was followed by Charles Ashcraft of the Arkansas Baptist Convention who presented an equal amount. Darwin Welsh, executive secretary for one of the youngest state conventions, Utah-Idaho, presented a check for \$200.

Another surprise gift will provide the convention with a state-assembly site. Adrian Hall, pastor of College Park Baptist Church, Las Vegas, reported the Southern Nevada Baptist Association had accepted a 320-acre ranch near Pioche, Nev., donated to the state convention "with no strings attached," by Tex and Beverly Fry of Lincoln County, Nev.

Mrs. Helen Fling, a Woman's Missionary Union worker with the Home Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union, reported the formation of a WMU organization for the new convention. WMU leaders from across the state named Mrs. Sandra Hall of Las Vegas as acting president and Mrs. Evelyn Newell of Fernley as recording secretary.

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Don Hepburn is director of communications and public relations for the Southern Baptist General Convention of California.

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers .

New Nevada Convention
Elects Ernest B. Myers

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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Ernest B. Myers, 53, was named the first executive director-treasurer of the Nevada Area Baptist Convention during the convention's constituting meeting in Las Vegas, Oct. 17.

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Myers, director of assemblies development for the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, Phoenix, will assume the Nevada leadership post on January 1, 1979, when the convention officially begins operating. Myers will rent office space in Reno and eventually hopes to secure property for a state convention headquarters.

He told the messengers in his first formal address, "If we're going to make an impact upon Nevada we must start new work." This he noted will mean "making the evangelized evangelists."

The Mississippi native assured the messengers that he "plans to be out there where the churches are." He said, "I want to feel the excitement of our people in sharing Jesus."

The new executive director expressed several dreams which he hopes the fledgling convention will achieve in its first year of operation.

Although the new convention will have 14,000 members and 75 churches, Myers said his first dream is to have "1,500 new people in our churches next year." He also said he hopes Nevada churches which baptize 900 people, up 150 from this year's level of the Nevada church which have been affiliated with the Arizona and California conventions.

A strong supporter of Sunday School work, Myers said increased Sunday School enrollment should be a "spearhead priority." He said that "we should have a minimum of 1,000 added to Sunday School this next year."

Myers headed Training Union and later Sunday School work for the Arizona Convention, 1956-61, before joining the Southern Baptist Sunday School, Nashville, Tenn., 1961-75, as an architectural consultant. He returned to the Arizona staff in 1975.

During his college and seminary days, Myers served in several student pastorates in Jackson, Miss., New Orleans, and Nashville.

Myers helped develop and has been active in leading churches to raise money for building purposes through the "Together We Build" program. He is the author of several books on church architecture and has written articles for numerous Southern Baptist periodicals.

A graduate of Mississippi College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Myers received an honorary doctor of laws degree from Grand Canyon College in 1977. He has done advance study at Peabody College, Nashville.

Myers is married to the former June McKay. They have two children, Ernie Jr., pastor, First Southern Baptist Church, Pomona, Calif., and Kay, professor of speech and drama at California Baptist College.

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Meeting Seeks Strategy To Reach Urban Millions

MANILA, Philippines (BP)--Asian Southern Baptist missionaries, pastors and other church leaders began seeking a strategy for winning 50 million Asians to Christ.

Sixty persons from 17 nations attended the First Asian Urban Strategy Conference conducted in Manila, Philippines, by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. They included 18 Asian pastors and leaders from strategic cities, 36 missionaries and six program personnel.

Ronald C. Hill, missionary from Thailand and program speaker, said the purpose of the meeting was "to share current approaches in urban evangelism and search for a comprehensive strategy for reaching the cities of Asia." Missionaries and Asian Baptist leaders voiced repeatedly the necessity to develop unique strategies for every city. They also emphasized

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the importance of a spiritual awakening and of training laity and clergy to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the masses by every possible means.

Winston Crawley of the Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Va., Don Larson, anthropologist and linguist from Bethel College, St. Paul, Minn., and Ralph W. Neighbour Jr., pastor of Westside Memorial Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, were the main speakers. Neighbour served as a missionary associate in Singapore for three years and has done extensive work in urban strategy. James B. Slack, chairman of the Philippine Baptist Mission, coordinated the conference.

The conference members came from Asian cities which boast a total population of over 50 million people. One of the major objectives of Bold Mission Thrust, Southern Baptists' plan to proclaim the gospel to the world by 2000 A.D., is expanded efforts in urban evangelism.

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Committee Named
To Study Merger

Baptist Press
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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Two church staff members, a college president, an editor and two denominational executives have been named to a special committee investigating the possibility of merging the Southern Baptist Convention's Brotherhood Commission with the SBC Sunday School Board

The SBC Executive Committee voted in September to call for such a study, after George E. Bagley, executive director of Alabama Baptist Convention, proposed the idea.

The Executive Committee asked that the two SBC agencies name three persons each to form a study committee, and to report to the Executive Committee by February, 1979.

The three Sunday School Board representatives are Norman Wiggins, president of Campbell College, Buies Creek, N. C., and chairman of the Sunday School Board trustees; Henry Love, church administrator for First Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., and a trustee of the board; and Grady Cothen, Sunday School Board president, Nashville, Tenn.

Brotherhood Commission representatives are William Hardy, minister of education, First Baptist Church, Columbus, Miss., and chairman of the commission trustees; Jack U. Harwell, editor of "The Christian Index," Georgia Baptist state newspaper, Atlanta, and a commission trustee; and Norman Godfrey, director of the commission's ministries section and convenor of a four-member cabinet which has run the commission since the accidental death of Glendon McCullough, executive director, on Aug. 23.

Hardy, who presided over the committee's first meeting in Memphis, location of the Brotherhood Commission, issued the following public statement.

"We're going to make as complete a study as possible of all aspects of this proposed merger of the Brotherhood Commission into the Sunday School Board. Many factors must be considered. The ultimate question must always be what is best for Baptist men and boys' work in local Baptist churches and in our denomination.

"We urge any Southern Baptist who has facts or opinions about this proposed merger to communicate immediately with any member of the six-member committee. We want as much input as possible from as many sources as possible as we study the question."

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