



December 19, 1978

78-207

Depression Accompanies
Christmas Season of Joy

By Adon Taft

MIAMI (BP)--This is the season to be jolly, according to one of the popular holiday songs. But for many clergymen and their families, Christmas is the most trying time of the year.

In fact, the stress of the period from Thanksgiving to New Year is a major contributor to divorce and rebellion of children in clergy families. And it often plays a role in the decision to leave the ministry, reports David M. Moss, a priest-psychologist who specializes in counseling pastors and their families.

Of course, the stress of the holidays is not limited to clergy. The jingling of Christmas bells is the death knell for about 3,000 persons who commit suicide during the Yuletide each year. That figure usually is higher than for any other month, notes Lyndel Barnes, associate director of national counseling centers for The Christian Broadcasting Network.

But the stress of dealing with some of those suicides and with many of the 30,000 other people who make an overt effort to kill themselves--usually out of loneliness--takes an added toll on the minister and his family already loaded with the special burdens of the clergy, observes Ken Smith, pastor of the South Miami First Baptist Church.

"You become frustrated because you can't help all the lonely people out there," explains Smith, whose doctoral work was in counseling. "And you feel guilty for neglecting your own family because of the demand on your time to counsel those who are depressed."

Such demands from the congregation and the public and the related frustration and guilt are a part of those special burdens carried by ministers and their families, according to Moss, an Episcopal priest from Miami who is on the staff of The Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago.

They also have to cope with the strain of living a fishbowl existence and, frequently, being poor. A recent survey by Money magazine disclosed that "the average Protestant minister makes \$13,000 including a housing allowance."

"It all begins with Thanksgiving," said Moss. "People have in their minds the Norman Rockwell painting of the extended family, which is no longer realized in our culture. And there are messages in the air about 'the family that prays together, stays together,' which also is less true today than it used to be.

"The whole thing is a catalyst for depression because under the pressure of trying to conform to their image of a happy person and having that image edited by reality, they become angry. They turn that anger inward because they think it would be immoral to spoil the holiday for the children."

Another facet of the Thanksgiving dilemma is that it is the beginning of a season emphasizing the family. "The commercials and all the activities are geared to the family during Thanksgiving and Christmas," Smith points out. "It emphasizes the loneliness--especially here where so many people are a long way from their families--felt by both young people and the extremely elderly who either had strong family backgrounds or wanted a good family background they didn't have."

That's when they get on the phone to talk for long periods with a clergyman. They call at all hours of the day and night, adding that much more to his burden.

Things get worse by Christmas when there is even more emphasis on children. And in the clergy home, the minister "feels hurt and the wife feels angry when the kid next door gets a new bike and they can't afford one for their children," Moss observes. "The wife complains to the kids, they resent the church and tend to ignore it as they grow up and get out on their own."

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Since most parents try to gloss over their own differences for the sake of the children at Christmas, Moss has found, it is the children who often sense the antagonism and rebell. "They either become depressed or try to suppress their gloom or avoid it by abusing drugs or alcohol or by engaging in promiscuity or destroying the property of others."

By New Year's Eve, all the bars are let down and "everything which was buried comes out in insults, physical and psychological assaults, and shame-prone displays," Moss reports. "Often, one or both gets drunk."

As for some of the other pressures, Smith feels that the church system needs to openly acknowledge that pastors get depressed because "this is the season of the biggest hope the church can offer in the coming of Jesus Christ, yet people get the most depressed during this time."

Henry Close, a divorced former Presbyterian clergyman, believes that part of the message of Christmas--particularly for clergy families--is that "if God is willing to settle for being a human being, why can't we?"

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Priorities Necessary
In Effective Service

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
12/19/78

GRAND PRAIRIE, Texas (BP)--Ministers cannot serve a church 24 hours a day without other, more important priorities in their lives suffering damaging consequences.

"You can't save all the people, solve all the problems or mend all the broken marriages singlehandedly," explained Ernest Mosley in a Priorities in Ministry conference to church staff members and their spouses from throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"For the Christian person, above all else, the meaning of life in relation to God must be healthy," said Mosley, supervisor of the pastoral section in The Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department. "Being a Christian is the high calling of God."

Mosley listed six priorities staff persons need to maintain for an effective, successful ministry. They are: Christian person, married person, parent person, church member person, called/employed person and community person.

Of these, Mosley said, marriage "could be the keenest testing ground for experiencing and expressing Christian values."

"It requires giving all of your attention part of the time," he said. "Marriage ought to provide a feeling of emotional security in addition to food, shelter and clothing."

"There is not much room in Southern Baptist life for ministers with broken marriages. For ministers, the church can be the problem. You can't meet the needs of family members if you stay at the church all hours of the day and night."

The minister's credibility can be lost or damaged, according to Mosley, if family members are continually relegated to second place on a busy calendar. Children need affection, honesty and availability of the minister-parent.

In spite of all the other demands made daily for the minister's time and attention, at times it is necessary to become an active part of the local community. "As Christians, we are members of two societies," Mosley said. "We can't just exist inside the church and not make an investment in our community."

"Home problems with children or spouse and conflict with a church member can often lead to a loss of spiritual excitement," Mosley said. "Ministers can suffer from a lack of motivation because the relationships out of which ministry must be performed weigh heavily on actual ministry situations."

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"You need to say, 'I'm a person with some gifts and some problems.' Then you need to decide whether you feel good or disappointed, angry and cheated. Each one of us is responsible for giving his life to God as a gift, one that is not worn out, torn up and destroyed."

"Don't make unrealistic goals of yourself and don't try to do what only God can do," Mosley emphasized. "Ours is a job of humanity, linked up with the divine resources of God."

"Success in the ministry is not measured just in terms of numbers. Your responsibility is to be available to God so your leadership will produce growth."

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Religious Rural Experts
Urge High Quality of Life

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
12/19/78

WASHINGTON (BP)--Representatives from the religious community met with White House officials to express concern for the quality of rural life as the Carter administration moves toward announcing a new rural policy.

Fourteen persons representing 10 denominations, including J. T. Burdine Jr., of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, told two White House rural affairs specialists that the government's commitment to human rights should include "the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of geography."

Burdine, special consultant in the Home Mission Board's rural-urban missions department, told Baptist Press that the group was asked by the White House to contribute ideas to the administration's upcoming policy statement. An urban policy statement was issued earlier.

The group urged Lynn Daft, who is responsible for developing the administration's overall rural policy, to work toward a policy which "will reflect a spirit of healthy interdependence between urban and rural America."

More specifically, the religious representatives asked that attention be given to basic structural changes in rural America, including the plight of the family farm, the rights of farm workers, and proper use of land and water.

The administration's rural policy should examine strip mining, the loss of "prime" agricultural land, the "potential threat" to world food supplies, and the "progressive concentration of land in the hands of corporations." Concern was expressed about what the group's statement called "recent trends towards corporate control of the nation's food production system" at the expense of the family farm system.

The statement also struck a note increasingly familiar to federal bureaucrats when it suggested that human services be provided "at the lowest practical level within the social structure." What individuals can do for themselves ought to be encouraged, it said, and what small groups can do ought not be taken over by larger ones, an indirect but obvious reference to government.

That would also mean that federal programs should be redirected toward making private groups, including churches, the "conduits of federal monies," the statement continued.

The group also insisted that proposed budget cuts "should not threaten basic rural life quality, nor hinder rural areas in development."

At the conclusion of the one-hour, fifteen-minute meeting, Daft said he would welcome further suggestions from the religious group as the administration's rural policy statement takes shape. He left open the possibility of a follow-up meeting after the first of the year.

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Sagemont Doubles Giving
For Bold Mission Thrust

By Barbara Rust

HOUSTON, Texas (BP)--The spirit of Bold Mission Thrust has so gripped Sagemont Baptist Church that members have decided to double all mission giving and increase personal missions efforts in 1979.

The increased giving did not automatically happen. It stems from the church and many of its members becoming debt free said pastor, John Morgan, and minister of missions, Dr. Hal Boone, a paraplegic who formerly served as a missionary physician in Africa.

The 2,500-member Houston church will give \$55,000 for worldwide missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program in 1978, a substantial increase over 1977's total of \$46,200. But it has voted to double Cooperative Program gifts to \$110,000 in 1979.

To further support Bold Mission Thrust, the SBC goal of reaching every person on earth with the message of Christ in this century, the church will also double the amount of its special mission offerings and its monthly gifts to the Union Baptist Association.

Sagemont decided to become debt free when Morgan realized churches of the Union Association paid more interest on loans than was given for missions.

The church's debt free status resulted from Financial Freedom Seminars Morgan developed three years ago. About 200 couples are now debt free because of the seminars, which Morgan offers throughout Texas.

"We never plan to borrow any more money," declares Boone. "We're going to build a new building and pay cash for it."

Emphasizing proper use of credit, Morgan said many people get so deep in debt that they have financial problems.

"We just handle the Lord's money," he said. "All 100 percent of what we have is entrusted to us by the Lord. Christians should be content to live on what God provides."

The Southern Baptist Bold Mission Thrust, which suggests a church double its mission giving by 1982, encouraged Sagemont not only to increase its mission gifts but to enlist Boone as minister of missions. Morgan previously considered hiring a minister of recreation.

"On the airplane returning from the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta this year, the Lord laid it on my heart to get a full-time missions minister," Morgan said. "We could get a part-time recreation minister to handle the need that we had at that time."

Boone, a former medical missionary in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, leads Sagemont church in beginning a worldwide mission program, although he's a paraplegic.

While in Kenya, where he was a physician and famine relief administrator, Boone's car rolled over, fracturing eight ribs and injuring his spinal cord.

"If I had those past 20 years (in the mission field) to do over again, I'd do it all over again," he said. "It's been a wonderful experience. We felt divine leadership in it. If the opportunity ever comes, we'll go again--if the opportunity comes for a guy in a wheelchair to serve."

Boone says the increased budget will help Sagemont support volunteers in mission service through Texas Baptists' Rio Grande River Ministry, Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board and the SBC Mission Service Corps.

"We already have a 22-year-old woman who has turned in her application for work in Brazil with students," Boone said. "What's happening at the church is a miracle,"

(BP)

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DEC. 20 1978

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