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Baptists Get Ready For Minority
Rule in Southwest, Pastor Says

By Jim Newton

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Al Garcia, aggressive and controversial pastor of Los Angeles City Baptist Church, is convinced that by the year 2000, California and most of the Southwestern United States will be governed by Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans.

To help his people prepare for the future, Garcia works in the Los Angeles County Social Services Department, and at night and on weekends as pastor of a Baptist church in the heart of Spanish-speaking Los Angeles.

Garcia argues forcefully that there is so much injustice in society, especially among the poor, voiceless Mexican-Americans, that the church must become an outspoken voice for change.

"If it (the church) does not take an active role in social action, we can't convince people we really care for their souls," he insists.

Garcia takes what he calls "a wholistic view" of the gospel. "We can't separate the soul from the body, the physical from the spiritual, the church from society," he says. "We must seek to meet the whole needs of the people--the physical and social as well as the spiritual."

During the week, Garcia lives this commitment as a staff development specialist for the Los Angeles County Social Services Department. In a key position in the department, Garcia is charged with developing staff training programs to help county welfare workers and management in the area of human relations.

He advocates welfare reform to eliminate paternalism which he says many Americans permit and encourage "to keep people in their place."

What is needed instead is a comprehensive welfare program designed to help people rise above their economic level, he says. That requires Americans to re-order their priorities, and spend more of their tax dollars on social services than on defense.

Both Jesus and the Old Testament prophets repeatedly voiced concern for the powerless people who are oppressed by the rich, and, therefore, Christians should take the lead and be the champions of justice in the world, Garcia argues.

"If we (Christians) don't denounce the wrong priorities of the world, no one else will," he insists.

He advocates education and social programs now for minority groups, especially Mexican-Americans, so the youth will be prepared for leadership roles when they are in the majority. Garcia leads his church to reach youth, including members of teenage gangs, in the Hollenbeck district of Los Angeles where his church is located.

A strong supporter of the Royal Ambassador training program for boys, Garcia insists that "if we don't reach these kids before they are 13, we won't be able to reach them by age 16."

There are about 30 gangs in the Hollenbeck district, and last year there were 47 homicides in the area. The average age of the victims was 15½.

Garcia recalls one incident when he was able to provide scholarships for five young teenagers to go to the Baptist camp at Jenness Park. Three of them came back telling him excitedly, "Pastor, we are saved."

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All three were problem kids who never came to church and were "a pain in the neck," Garcia adds. One of them, Joel, was a potential gang leader who had painted the door and walls of the church with graffiti earlier that same summer. After he returned from camp, he asked for paint to clean up the mess he had made.

"We badly need a social center for youth in the barrio to help deal with all the problems these kids have," Garcia says. "I feel like I'm spinning my wheels--there's just not much I can do."

Lack of time handicaps Spanish-speaking Baptist pastors in the Los Angeles area where only two are full-time. The rest work in a secular job to provide adequate financial support for their families.

This causes tensions at home. "They spend all their time at night and on weekends to minister to their people, and to prepare messages for Sunday, so they neglect themselves and their families," Garcia says.

Paternalism in the denomination raises its ugly head, he claims, in many of the policies affecting language missions work, primarily because the policies are made by Anglos, rather than representatives of the minority groups most affected.

Garcia has been an outspoken advocate of more representation of ethnic groups on Southern Baptist Convention boards of trustees. In 1974, he nominated a Spanish Baptist pastor as president of the SBC, and was a leader in an effort to change SBC bylaws to provide at least 10 percent ethnic representation on SBC boards and committees. Both proposals were defeated by messengers to the convention in Dallas, but the following year, 17 ethnics were elected to boards and committees of the convention.

Garcia may not be a "typical" Spanish-speaking Baptist pastor in California, but he is acknowledged as one of the most outspoken.

But he doesn't seem to worry about his reputation, or what others may think. "I'm just trying to take a stand for what is right, and for the rights of Hispanic people," he insists.

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Adapted from March 1979 World Mission Journal.

New Orleans Seminary
Begins Station Operation

Baptist Press
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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has begun broadcasting continuous Christian programming over its own radio station.

Station WBSN-FM, located on the seminary campus in east New Orleans, broadcasts from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday. It has 10 watts of power and can be received through most of Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes.

The station, planned for more than two years, will increase to 250 watts over the next 24 months, according to station manager Paul Gericke, director of the seminary library where the station is located.

Gericke said the station will serve as both an educational tool to give seminary students experience in programming and station operation, and as a missionary arm of the seminary, providing an outlet for preaching, evangelism and Christian music.

The station was constructed with equipment donated by New Orleans resident Mrs. Henry Thomas. Its operating expenses will be from contributions.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers by New Orleans Seminary.



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Iran Missionaries
Safely Evacuated

FRANKFURT, Germany (BP)--The Henry E. Turlingtons, the last Southern Baptist missionaries in Iran, have been safely evacuated to Frankfurt, Germany.

Mr. and Mrs. Turlington informed the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board through a message via a Frankfurt minister to another Southern Baptist missionary that they were safe in Frankfurt and would proceed to India.

This information was confirmed by Red Cross workers who called the Turlingtons' son, John, stationed in Kansas with the U. S. military. According to the Red Cross, the couple left Iran Feb. 18.

Word on their safety had been anxiously awaited since the general evacuation was announced a week earlier, following seizure of the American embassy in Tehran. The Turlingtons were stationed in Tehran where he was pastor of an English-language congregation serving U. S. military and business personnel.

Missionary Journeyman Michael Joe Sowder was evacuated Jan. 31 from Iran and is currently in the United States awaiting possible reassignment to Scotland.

Other Southern Baptist missionaries and their families had already left the country during various stages of the escalating civil conflict. Most of them left the country with military or business personnel.

The Turlingtons said earlier that if they had to leave Iran they would go to Bangalore Baptist Hospital, a Southern Baptist mission station in India, for a vacation.

The Turlingtons told the Frankfurt minister they were allowed to leave Tehran with only one bag each and that they still had hopes of returning to Iran.

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist editors by the Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

Thorn Resigns As Head
Of Dallas Baptist College

Baptist Press
2/20/79

DALLAS (BP)--William E. Thorn, president of Dallas Baptist College since 1975, has resigned effective June 1.

Thorn became president of the financially troubled college May 15, 1975. He led the school to successful completion of a \$2.9 million financial campaign, which was launched with contributions from Dallas Baptist Association.

Dallas Baptist College has received unqualified accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools during Thorn's administration. Thorn said he resigned to devote full time to his speaking ministry and that his original commitment to the school was only for three years.

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Uranium Mine Pastor's
Life, Living Different

By Jim Newton

SHIRLEY BASIN, Wyo. (BP)--Eddie Nipper makes his living as a maintenance man for the Pathfinder Uranium Mines at Shirley Basin, Wyo., 65 miles due south of Casper.

He makes his life, however, as the bi-vocational, self-supporting pastor of Shirley Basin Baptist Church.

It's the first church he's ever tried to lead as pastor, and although it's not without its problems, he loves it.

In less than nine months his 13-member church doubled. Nipper, ordained to the ministry last April, has baptized six new members and is waiting for the creek to thaw to baptize four others.

He's found more acceptance on the job than he has as the local Baptist pastor. "Up here, it just takes time to be accepted by the people," he said. "It's not like it is back in Oklahoma and Texas. The people are just now beginning to accept me."

A lot of the people who live in Shirley Basin feel they have no need for the church, or for Christ, he added. A few have greeted him at the door when he's tried to visit by telling him, "Naw, I don't want to talk to you." Some even laughed in his face.

Many of them have deep spiritual problems that they won't admit to themselves or to others, Nipper observed. There's a lot of drinking, family problems, divorce, and even child abuse, he said. The problems are worse in the winter when the isolation and lack of recreation become more intense. "There's nothing to do, nowhere to go. No entertainment of any kind," he said.

Shirley Basin, population about 750, is built completely with mobile homes and trailers. There's only one permanent structure in the entire town, and it has a public bar inside.

"People drink beer here just like it was water," Nipper said. "There's a lot of alcoholism, and problem drinking. Many drink because of boredom and loneliness."

Nipper has had an easier time establishing a good relationship with his church. About 30 attend worship services regularly, meeting in a double-wide trailer that once was a residence. Sunday School attendance averages 35 to 40, most of them children who ride a bus to church.

Nipper has been surprised by the way people relate to him now that he is an ordained minister, even though he still works for a living in a secular job. "They set me up on a pedestal and think I ought to be different from everyone else," he confided. "That's not right, but that's the way it is."

He hopes other lay preachers, like himself, will feel God calling them to missions in Wyoming. "But a person has got to be led of the Lord here," he cautioned. "If he comes out here on his own, he's whipped already."