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Howard Parshall Ministers
Among "God's Little Ones"

By Walker Knight

PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--The plaque on the front of the red-brick chapel reads "God's House, dedicated to the Least of God's Little Ones, 1970."

"The least of God's little ones" are the members of the chapel, the severely and profoundly retarded residents of the Pinecrest State School.

Leading the flock is Howard Parshall, chaplain to the 1,600 retarded residents. When Parshall came to the school in 1957 as a prospective chaplain, his first glimpse was a room filled with about 50 profoundly retarded male residents, most of them nude, jumping up and down or rocking back and forth, oblivious to each other.

By showing the young chaplain this section first, the superintendent exercised shock treatment, telling him, "These people are a part of our institution, and they are ones to whom you'll be ministering."

Now, more than 20 years later, Howard Parshall and Pinecrest State School have gone through profound changes together. The residents have moved from mass quarters to four-person rooms and are fully clothed and in control of their bodily functions.

An attendant is responsible for every 10 persons, and each resident's day is programmed for dressing, feeding, walking, bus rides, chapel, projects, canteen visitation and recreation.

Under Parshall's direction, chaotic and disorderly worship services took on more and more the form of traditional church. As he searched for ways to communicate Christ, the services became a focal point and the concept of his own ministry unfolded.

"I found that I became a religious figure who represents the living God," he explains. "They understood God partly by understanding me and what I tell them about God--what they see and feel and experience in me as a person."

Services begin with a medley of bright religious songs by a volunteer pianist on Sunday morning while people gather. A student assistant from Louisiana College leads the singing, drawing on songs that require physical movements, such as "Do Lord". Volunteers from the audience sing solos, followed by a short scripture and prayer by Howard. The ensuing sermon is short, simple, repetitious.

"I have learned to put very little credence in the spoken word," Howard says. "They cannot think abstractly. Their involvement in an experience is more important."

"The story or sermon is the weakest part of the service. I am probably communicating more by my tone of voice, my stance and my gesture than by what I say."

Over the years, the desire for a "real" church grew strong, and persons throughout Louisiana began to raise money for a chapel. Eventually \$40,000 was collected and the school's maintenance crew provided the labor. Individuals and small groups bought pews.

At every worship service at Pinecrest, residents gave their nickels and dimes. After 10 years, this offering had reached more than \$750, enough for the piano.

Parshall ministers to the 1,600-member school staff informally as he visits the cottages, hospital or administration buildings. But staff members feel strong support from him.

Paul Erny, the education director, says "He is a good release for me. We can talk. There is a lot of pressure in these positions and a few minutes with Howard seems to relieve that pressure."

One expansion of Parshall's ministry relates to death. Not only does he attempt to minister to the dying and their families, but he plays a central role in the funeral of residents whose bodies are not claimed by relatives or are to be buried on the grounds.

Parshall is funeral director, signing death certificates and taking charge of the cemetery and recording the graves. He is determined to have the services as close to normal as possible, and he utilizes the school's Boy Scouts to serve as pallbearers.

When Parshall visits the Pinecrest canteen, the popular place to spend money and time, he is greeted with a constant stream of hugs, requests for him to read their letter or just to sit with them.

In the canteen, Parshall always finds a seat near the wall. "I never know when a strong arm is going to grab me, and I have to watch for spilling coffee and drinks," he explains.

The first two or three years at Pinecrest, Parshall tried "to program for the residents, to make things happen." Then, he recalls, "it began to dawn on me that they were affecting my life. They were making a contribution to me as a human being.

"The road to ministry was a road to openness to persons, just simply being myself with them. As this began to happen, they ceased to be retardates and more and more became my friends. They became persons. This is when my ministry turned around."

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Adapted from Chaplaincy: Love On the Line, written by Walker Knight, photographed by Steve Wall, Copyright 1978, Home Mission Board, SBC.

(BP) photos mailed to Baptist state newspapers by Atlanta Bureau of Baptist Press.

Mrs. Little
Just 'Hung On'

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WICHITA FALLS, Texas (BP)--Bessie Little, 78, a delicate woman weighing less than a hundred pounds, literally stood up to the whirling black force of the tornado that leveled her home April 10 in Wichita Falls.

When Mrs. Little heard sirens warn the city of the tornadoes, she ran inside her house, locked the door and held on.

After the tornado passed, friends found Mrs. Little holding tightly to the inside door knob of her front door. The door and Mrs. Little were all that were left standing after the tornado demolished her tidy, red-trimmed white house.

"I can tell you a thousand stories like that," said Ted Savage, Mrs. Little's pastor at Faith Baptist Church. "While the tornado was in the midst of destroying property, God was in the midst of saving lives."

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Nigerian Baptist Convention
Names Dahunsi's Successor

Baptist Press
5/4/79

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Samuel T. Ola Akande, president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and a graduate of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been named general secretary of the 300,000-member Nigerian Convention.

Akande, 53, has been acting general secretary since the death of Emanuel A. Dahunsi early this year. For the past two years, he has been president of the convention and pastor of Orita Mefa Baptist Church in Ibadan.

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Named at the convention's annual meeting, he will lead Baptist work in Southern Baptists' second oldest mission field. The first Southern Baptist missionaries went to Nigeria in 1850, four years after they entered China.

"Leaders like Akande are a sign of maturity in the convention," said John E. Mills, the Foreign Mission Board's secretary for West Africa. Mills, who baptized Akande in 1949, says he looks with confidence at future relationships between the board and the Nigerian Convention.

Akande is a graduate of Wayland Baptist College, Plainview, Texas, and a two-time graduate of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He taught New Testament at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

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Vins to Address
SBC in Houston

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HOUSTON (BP)--Georgi Vins, dissident Soviet Baptist pastor, has agreed to give the final address at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston June 12-14.

Vins was among five Soviet dissidents sent to the U. S. in exchange for two convicted spies. April 27. He is the secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union, which broke away from the officially sanctioned All Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

He has been in and out of jail since 1966. He was last arrested in 1974 and tried in 1975 on charges of defaming the Soviet state and infringing on the rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious ceremonies.

Vins's address will come at 9 p.m. at the Summit, site of the majority of the meetings for the three-day annual session. The original program said the meeting would close after the address by Emmanuel Scott, Los Angeles pastor. Vins's appearance is an addition to the program.

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Arkansas's Ashcraft
Announces Retirement

Baptist Press
5/4/79

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Charles H. Ashcraft, executive secretary of the Arkansas Baptist Convention since 1969, has announced his early retirement effective April 30, 1980.

Ashcraft, 62, said in making the announcement that he wants to become more personally involved in Bold Mission Thrust, the Southern Baptist goal to give everyone in the world a chance to hear the gospel of Jesus by the year 2000.

He plans to help train Mexican clergymen at the International Bible Institute in El Paso, Texas, and says he wants to be instrumental in establishing at least one mission chapel.

Ashcraft was the first executive secretary of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention when it was formed in 1964. He will help establish the Charles H. Ashcraft Bible chair at Boise State University after retirement.

Ashcraft graduated from Ouachita Baptist University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a military chaplain and established the First Southern Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nev. He held additional pastorates in Arkansas, Indiana and New Mexico.

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Baptists Request Workers
For Rebuilding Uganda

By Mary Jane Welch

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries to Uganda are requesting seven volunteers and eight career missionaries to assist in community rehabilitation and restoring Baptist work after receiving assurance of religious freedom from the new government.

The Ugandan government has given Baptists responsibility for aid distribution in eastern Uganda, the area where Baptist work was strongest before they and 26 other religious groups were banned by former president Idi Amin in 1977.

A plan worked out by missionaries G. Webster Carroll and James L. Rice calls for churches in the villages to be distribution points for food, medical supplies, and agricultural aids flowing in from government and private relief agencies.

They have requested at least five tons of powdered milk per month for the next six months from Southern Baptist hunger relief funds to go to Mombasa, a Kenya seaport, and are also requesting agricultural supplies for distribution.

On their first trip into Uganda, Carroll and Rice supervised distribution of 1,000 pounds of medical supplies provided by Medical Assistance Program (MAP) of Carol Stream, Ill. They anticipate 20 tons of intravenous fluids from MAP and 20 tons of high protein food supplements from other relief agencies coming to Mombasa within the next two months.

Restoration plans also call for reopening Baptist churches in Uganda and staffing five Bible schools with teams of missionaries and pastors from the Baptist mission of Kenya and the Baptist Convention of Kenya on a rotating basis. The schools meet one week each month.

Carroll also reported that household workers at the missionary homes in Jinja were safe, although the homes had been looted. He said small movable items, such as dishes, clothing and linens were taken, but items too large for a land rover, such as a sofa and refrigerator, remained.

Volunteers requested included a Bible Way correspondence director, water project director, and a Baptist communications director. Carroll said 17 letters from correspondence students were waiting in Jinja when he got there. He also said that in recent months there had been a rush in borrowing tapes of Bible studies and sermons in English and Swahili. A communications director would direct a cassette ministry and a radio and television ministry.

He said that the minister of natural resources, wildlife and tourism, on a flight to Nairobi with him, had mentioned a basic need for repairing boreholes to make water available.

Other volunteers requested are three student workers and a general maintenance person to help repair churches and keep vehicles and machinery working.

Career missionaries requested are four evangelism and church development workers, one student work coordinator, a physician, an agriculturist and a veterinarian.