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Four Agency 'Rookies'
Endure First Convention

By Craig Bird

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Being new on the job is bad enough, but facing 13,000 of their bosses at one time was awesome for four men who participated in their first Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings as SBC agency heads.

Harold Bennett of the Executive Committee, R. Keith Parks of the Foreign Mission Board, Jimmy Allen of the Radio-Television Commission, and James Smith of the Brotherhood Commission have been in their jobs for a year or less—but all have established plans to relate their agencies to the needs of the churches of the convention to best fulfill the Great Commission.

The group hit the ground running to the beat of Bold Mission Thrust. Excitement about Southern Baptists' effort to tell the entire world of Christ by the year 2000 flows in and out of their conversations.

"The most exciting task of the Executive Committee is the coordination of Bold Mission Thrust," Bennett claimed. "We don't have task assignments like the other agencies, but the basic recommendations of goals and programs for Bold Mission Thrust have come and will continue to come from the Executive Committee. We are the enablers."

Parks sees the acid test for Bold Mission Thrust looming in the near future (Are we willing to pay for the programs we've outlined?) but is confident that the individual Baptist is going to respond. Smith is positive; "Bold Mission Thrust is of God; this is a great conviction of mine."

Allen practically glows at the opportunities for his agency to reach America during the 1980s with media programs.

"The mind and soul of America is being fashioned through the media—that is a fact of a crowded, technological society," he said. "And with the emergence of cable system and home video units it is so close to being a new ball game that we have a real opportunity to fashion the mind and soul of America in a way that would be pleasing to God."

"Pleasing God" and "Bold Mission Thrust" seem to be interchangeable terms with the four men.

"The uniqueness of Baptist Men has to be its emphasis on missions," Smith said. "There is no way we can call out, train and send out enough professionals—we have to depend on the lay movement."

It is also the laymen who must pay the bills, Bennett and Parks agreed.

"Our crisis will come over budget," Bennett said. "We have to help the individual Baptist to understand the whole program. Twenty years ago churches were averaging giving 10 to 12

percent of their budget to the Cooperative Program. Last year it was down to eight percent. If we could recover that percentage we would have more than enough money to fund all budget requests."

All four men are moving in apparent faith that response will fund their programs—programs that will bear the personal stamp of each of the directors.

Both Smith and Allen have spent their first months studying and planning the directions their agencies will take, while Bennett and Parks are modifying programs well established.

"The Brotherhood Commission has had problems staying on its track," Smith explained. "When it began in 1907 it was a lay mission movement. In the 1920s it shifted to a deacon ministry, and in the 1970s nobody took the decade's mood of 'flexibility' more literally than the Brotherhood Commission.

"What we wound up with was Baptist men who didn't know they were Baptist Men—doing lay renewal work and disaster relief and jail ministry, unaware that those programs are what Baptist Men is all about."

Smith intends for the direction to remain clear from now on—involve men and boys in missions. And he says the pastor should be the foremost Baptist man in each church.

Allen has designated his first year as "tooling up" time, the second year for "launch" and the third year for "acceleration."

"I see the opportunity for the media to become the catalyst for a real spiritual awakening," he said.

But while the changing world of media is compelling Allen to chart new techniques and programs, he shares with Bennett and Parks the advantages of following a long-time agency head—all three were preceded by men who served 25 years or longer.

Parks, despite 25 years with the Foreign Mission Board, is aware he doesn't have "the history, prestige or sense of awareness of Baker Cauthen (previous director)." "So I've tried to bring a broader based counsel to augment those things I lack," he said. "When I throw out my ideas and answers they are there to be shot down if they aren't the best ideas and answers."

Bennett followed Porter Routh at the Executive Committee and says: "The stability and confidence in his leadership was a great benefit and most of the routine and details of the Executive Committee are done the way he set them up. The thing I do is ask the question 'why' about the way things are done...and if I don't get solid answers then we consider changing our methods."

Allen inherited a negative legacy from the public spat over former Radio-TV Commission President Paul Steven's retirement plan. The backwash caught Allen when stories broke about his trustees considering an interest-free loan to help him buy a home.

"I was unprepared for the erosion of the trust factor between our public and the agency," Allen admitted. "In my years as pastor I always operated with a great deal of trust and I learned that we have to rebuild the trust for the Radio and Television Commission and pay close attention to the needs of the churches we serve."

Parks also was embroiled in controversy when the Foreign Mission Board expressed public dissatisfaction with the Executive Committee's recommendation on distribution of Cooperative Program money in 1980-81. The resulting tension was evident across the convention to the extent that Parks discouraged attempts to amend the budget from the floor of the St. Louis meeting.

"If it (the dispute) had to happen at all, I'm glad it happened early," Parks said. "I learned a great deal about how to interact with the other agencies—it's not the way you want to learn but it certainly is a quick way to learn."

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Brotherhood Adds
Associate Directors

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission added two associate directors in its Baptist Men's division and replaced an editor in the Royal Ambassador division in a series of actions by the agency's executive committee at its quarterly meeting.

Added to the Baptist Men's division were Larry Yoder, 36, of Richmond, Va., who will specialize in curriculum and training, and Frank Black, current staff member, who will major on men's ministry projects.

Yoder was associate secretary of the Baptist Men's department for Virginia Baptists. Black, a 25-year employee of the commission, directed the Crusader department in the Royal Ambassador division.

David Haney, division director, called the creation of the two new staff positions the initial step in preparing a major new thrust in lay involvement in behalf of Bold Mission Thrust.

"The goal of one million men in missions during the 1980s is an integral part of these staff additions and of a new approach in curriculum training," he added.

James B. Johnson, 52, of Pine Bluff, Ark., was elected editor of Pioneer materials, including Probe and Pioneer Plans magazines.

Johnson, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, for 13 years, filled a vacancy left by Mike Davis, who recently became director of the editorial services department.

In other action, the committee approved a concept for challenging laymen to become involved in Bold Mission Thrust, the denomination's plan for sharing the gospel with the world by the year 2000.

The action followed a discussion of suggestions made at 10 lay utilization conferences conducted throughout the United States in April and May by the agency at the request of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. The concept calls for a forum of the 400 concerned Baptist laymen invited to the recent lay utilization conferences.

The committee also discussed the possibility of a national men's meeting just prior to the 1982 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans but delayed action until a 75th anniversary committee for the agency could make a report.

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Norman Godfrey, associate executive director of the commission, was named chairman of the anniversary committee, made up of staff, trustees and state Brotherhood leaders.

Everett Lemay, pastor of First Baptist Church, Albion, Ill., was appointed chairman of a committee to explore a possible name change for the commission. The committee will report to agency trustees at a meeting on Nov. 5-7.

Executive Director James H. Smith reported he received a written apology from the national office of Boy Scouts of America and an explanation that scouting representatives had no authority to propose a merger of Boy Scouts and Royal Ambassador programs in Southern Baptist churches.

Smith also briefed the committee on the doctrinal integrity resolution passed at the SBC in June and assured the trustees their agency would comply.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Memphis bureau of Baptist Press.

Convention Booth
Gets Out Message

Baptist Press
7/22/80

DETROIT (BP)--To get out the message of Jesus Christ.

That was one of the goals of a booth sponsored by Southern Baptists at the Republican National Convention and—if numbers are any indication—it succeeded.

More than 6,000 pieces of Christian literature were distributed during the six days of volunteer operation at the booth, sponsored by the Greater Detroit Baptist Association, the Baptist State Convention of Michigan and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

At least one man committed himself to Christ as a result of evangelizing at the booth—the only Christian outreach facility at the convention.

"It's really a surprise to see them here," said Arney Arms, a Southern Baptist and convention guest from Elizabethton, Tenn.

Arms and his family were strangers to Detroit and after spotting the Southern Baptist booth, said it was nice to talk to people with whom they had something in common.

That sort of comment pleases Larry Martin, director of the Greater Detroit Baptist Association.

Plans for a Southern Baptist presence at the convention were hatched last year after the Republicans announced Detroit as their convention site. Plans to distribute literature on Detroit streets were scratched because of anticipated security around the convention center, Martin said, "so we came up with the idea of a booth."

The facility was near the center of activity in the 70-story Detroit Plaza Hotel. Thousands of delegates and sightseers at the convention exhibit hall strolled by for literature or a button which said, "Ask Me About the GOP."

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The Southern Baptist version of GOP was not Grand Old Party, but "Gospel of Peace."

Despite being at a political convention, the Baptist message was nonpolitical with passersby getting a shopping list of material about Southern Baptist concerns such as world hunger, alcoholism, race relations and ecology.

A 23-year-old man committed himself to Christ after talking at the booth at length with Suzanne Blount, summer missionary in Detroit and resident of Leesburg, Fla.

The whole operation was aided and observed by Ken Prickett, a consultant on special projects for the Home Mission Board. The Detroit booth is a prototype for similar operations at other events, particularly a world's fair planned for Knoxville, Tenn., in 1982, Prickett said.