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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**Richmond Church Action
Draws Protest Pickets**

By Dan Martin

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Seven persons have launched a picket-carrying protest after the deacons of Grove Avenue Baptist Church asked them not to attend services at the church.

The seven--six women and a man--paraded near the church for two Sundays (Aug. 10 and 17) and a Wednesday (Aug. 13) carrying hand-lettered signs quoting Scripture and calling on the pastor to repent.

They have said they will continue their action.

Church leaders, however, have decided to take no immediate action. "We are hoping to let it burn itself out," said Bill Carter, associate pastor of the 2,000-member congregation.

The picketing followed a letter from B. Russell Robins, chairman of the church's deacon body, to Mrs. Muriel Patch, a former member who still attended the church. The letter, drafted with an attorney's advice, said the decision to take the action came "after much prayer and deliberation and after three years of frustration in trying to resolve the problem caused by your conduct before, during and after church services. While we respect your freedom to worship, when your actions interfere with the right of others to worship and fellowship, we feel the rights and needs of the entire congregation must prevail."

The letter warned Mrs. Patch and her followers--estimated at between six and 11 persons--they would be arrested for trespassing should they attempt to attend services or come onto church property.

Pastor Vander Warner said none of the group is a member of the congregation. Mrs. Patch, he said, joined the church about eight years ago on a profession of faith. Later, after becoming involved in the charismatic movement, she placed her membership elsewhere, he said.

Mrs. Patch, he added, attended Grove Avenue church most Sunday nights and Wednesdays, however.

Warner, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference in 1973, said he wrote Mrs. Patch "about six months ago," and, although he avoided asking her to leave the church, accused her of "unacceptable" behavior.

"For at least several years, and probably longer, she had written letters to me, telling me of my 'errors'. They were letters of condemnation. Sometimes I would get a few; one week I got 10 letters. When my secretaries refused them, she began taping them on my car," Warner said.

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Warner added: "People tell me I have been too nice, that I let it go on too long, but I kept hoping the gospel would get through. Before God, I have no regret for having been open and for having tried to help."

The problem came to a head, he said, when disturbances began to occur in worship services. They took the form of the group muttering the sermon was untrue, leaving during services, noisily leafing through notes or the Bible during services and confrontation with staffers and other members.

Associate pastor Carter said: "I am pleased with the stand the men have taken. I think we have had enough harrassment. I think the action is probably two years overdue."

Mrs. Patch was unavailable for comment to Baptist Press, but told Ed Briggs, religion editor of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, she had been ousted because the pastor fears her group has identified error in his preaching.

According to Briggs, Mrs. Patch said she has been led by God to confront Warner with what she sees as error in his interpretation of the Scripture, and said she feels the pastor places too much emphasis on agape love of accepting others at face value without condemnation of sin.

Mrs. Patch told the newsman she and her group will "do what God tells us to do," and that means continued picketing. She added, according to Briggs, the only solution is for the church to ask them to return.

Deacon Robins noted the whole thing "is a strange situation. We lived with it as long as we could. Our action is final. Knowing the group as I do, I cannot see how we could invite them back unless there was a complete reversal of their approach."

Warner, who currently is a member of the SBC Committee on Boards, said: "I feel like I want to burst into tears. I feel nothing but pity for these people. I have had anger, but not now."

He added the second Sunday of the protest, with six persons carrying placards outside, 27 persons made public decisions, about half of which were first time professions of faith.

"God is continuing to bless us," he said.

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Smith Leads Prayer
At Demo Convention

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NEW YORK (BP)--In a 2 1/2 minute prayer before the Democratic National Convention Aug. 14, Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith asked God to forgive America for the blight of immorality and for its disregard for the lives of both the living and the unborn.

Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., was invited by the program planners to give the invocation for that session of the convention. He took advantage of the opportunity to pray an evangelical prayer, he said, asking God to bring America back to the issues that made it great and that the Bible would become the nation's standard of living.

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He asked for God's blessings and protection on President Carter and prayed that Carter would always lean on God for direction and strength. Smith asked that America never forget that "blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

Smith said his petition regarding the sanctity of life was a reference to the Democratic campaign platform that favors the availability of abortion.

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Rogers Smith Hospitalized
With Type of Bone Cancer

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Rogers M. Smith, special assistant to the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, has been hospitalized with multiple myeloma, a type of bone cancer.

He had been complaining of back pain during the Foreign Missions Conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center earlier this month and entered a Richmond hospital after he arrived home.

Doctors discovered the disease had weakened the 11th vertebra in Smith's back, causing his back pain.

He has been fitted with a brace and Mrs. Smith said Aug. 19 she expects him to go home in a day or two. He has completed the first series of chemotherapy treatments, she said. The next series will begin in about a month.

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Miami Kids Prefer Missions
Over Saturday Morning TV

By Elaine Hobson Miller

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Saturday morning is cartoon time for kids, except the kids of a Miami, Fla., church.

At Glendale Baptist Church cartoons and missions are in direct competition, and missions is coming out ahead.

"We have some 300 kids enrolled on Saturday mornings, from Mission Friends on through Acteens and older RA groups," says Joseph C. Coats, pastor of the 1,500-member, predominantly black church. "For two hours on Saturday mornings, that's it."

Glendale, one of the largest and most active black churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, used to hold the missions education meetings on Wednesdays, but had problems getting people to attend. When Coats observed the situation more closely, he found that the afternoon time conflicted with the job schedules of many of the workers, and with the different school shifts of the children.

"Saturday was kind of a loose day, and the Lord just spoke to me about it one night," Coats says. "I called all the workers together and said, 'Why don't we try Saturday mornings for a couple of hours and see how it works?' Surprisingly, they all agreed."

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The 10 a.m. to noon session is divided into two parts, with the first hour-and-a-half devoted to mission studies. The last half hour is set aside for recreation or mission action.

"Workers take the kids to migrant camps to see how kids get along there," Coats explains. "Some of the older girls go to the convalescent home, where they comb the hair of the elderly or make them little scarves and things."

"The boys go out into the community with the men, sometimes cleaning yards and sometimes cleaning stoves and kitchens for men in the area. In other words, they try to teach these boys and girls how to be good citizens as well as caring and sharing."

The enthusiasm of the children for their missions programs probably stems from the missions philosophy of the pastor himself. "People--instead of things--ought always to be the focus of the congregation," he says. "We emphasize, from the children all the way up, that missions is one of the things Christ left for the church to do."

Coats teaches five classes each week on missions and stewardship. His work shows up in the growth of his church and other black churches in Florida as well. "I don't teach money. I teach Christians giving themselves first to the Lord," he says. "That's my stewardship program."

Glendale Church was organized as a mission in 1963, with just 20 members. Coats became pastor in 1967 and two years later led the church in becoming the first black congregation in Miami to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention. Since then, the total number of predominantly black churches in the Florida Baptist Convention has grown to 14, with seven of them in the Miami area.

In addition, Glendale has started three missions within a 100-mile radius of the church, one of which has recently constituted into a church.

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Elain Hobson Miller is a writer from Birmingham, Ala.

Farmer Successful
'Treading the Streets'

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)—Gladys Farmer is at it again.

Last year, she retired as director of a Baptist goodwill center in the heart of Montgomery, Ala.

But her retirement has to be one of the shortest on record. Six months later, she's deeply immersed in a similar job, helping the Springfield (Tennessee) Baptist Mission start a weekday program for residents of a low-income neighborhood.

But Farmer obviously wouldn't have it any other way. "I tread the streets, and I love it," she says of the one-to-one approach she uses to invite people to the mission-sponsored programs.

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"I've made more than 400 visits since April, but that's not enough," she told participants at a Woman's Missionary Union conference in August.

She says the purpose of these visits and of the programs themselves is to "build relationships in a quiet, realistic way."

"I try to be gracious and friendly. I don't pry, and I don't take a religious census. I just tell people that I want to work with them in their neighborhood," she says.

During visits, Farmer tries to discover some of the things people need. Then she sets about trying to match that need with one of the mission's programs.

The programs include tutoring services, courses on husband-wife relationships, sewing, quilt-making, crafts, and Bible studies. There is also a coffeehouse for young people.

During the recent heat wave, the mission, along with several other community agencies, sponsored a heat shelter. It offered refreshments, food, and activities free for anyone who would come by.

According to Farmer, the success of the programs can be traced directly to the mission's pastor, Jerry Oakley, and his staff of 100 volunteers. "The pastor has to be behind it all the way, or it won't work," she says.

Farmer urged conferees to volunteer their time and skills to aid people in their communities. "If people only knew how exciting volunteering is, why, they would just run to do it," she says.

"Those who've volunteers have found their lives radically changed. We found an elderly man who had never learned to read. Then we found a woman who was a social worker who was willing to teach him.

"After the man learned to read, he said, 'Now that I can read, I can do so much more.' Now that man was happy, but the woman who taught him to read, she was ecstatic."

Working with the Springfield mission is only part of Farmer's job. She also works with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board on special assignment. She travels through the states helping churches strengthen existing weekday programs or start new ones.

"I think I've got enough to keep me busy for a little while," she quips.