

**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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St. Louis Pastor
Helps Ease Strife

ST. LOUIS (BP)--A St. Louis pastor has been involved in an effort to ease potential strife as St. Louis schools began massive busing to comply with a federal court desegregation order.

Larry Lewis, pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church, was one of a number of pastors who volunteered to work at schools heavily impacted by black-to-white or white-to-black busing.

"I was part of a greeting committee in North St. Louis," Lewis said. "We worked at Soldan High School, where whites were being bused into a predominately black school. We were there to meet and greet the students, to help create good will."

Involvement of the ministers was spearheaded by the Coalition for Peaceful Integration and Quality Education, although several ministerial groups took part.

Included was the Southside Ministerial Association, a group of about 100 ministers of various denominations, including Catholic and Jews.

"We have been talking about busing for two years," said Lewis, who was association president last year. "We anticipated busing would be ordered and we discussed how we could help create an orderly transition."

For the first days of the busing, Lewis said "things went along beautifully. There was absolutely no hostility or difficulties." Then, white students boycotted a southside high school to which blacks were being bused.

"It was disheartening," Lewis said. "But we are determined to do what we can to ease the situation."

When the boycott continued, about 50 ministers showed up at the school—Cleveland High School—to help ease strife and prevent violence.

"There was no violence or harrassment," Lewis said. "I believe the ministers' presence tended to keep those things down."

He indicated the ministers will continue working as welcoming committees until the problem is resolved.

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Even with the boycott, Lewis said he has been "impressed at the minimum of violence or bitterness. A great number of the students seem to be taking the initiative to create good will. Some wore pins which said, 'Let's make it work'."

Lewis became more involved because his church "is the largest significant church in South St. Louis. We have more than 600 young people enrolled, and all are involved in the busing decision. Not all were bused, but all were in schools where busing occurred.

"I became involved because many of these students were involved. I kept hearing students and parents tell me they weren't going to be bused, or that they would drop out or things like that. I felt it was very important for me to be a positive influence in this matter," Lewis added.

He noted he does not "personally favor busing to achieve racial balance in schools," but added: "We as Christians are committed to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. When people sell their homes, drop out of school or become part of a radical, militant protest group, they are not being part of the solution."

Lewis recalled he told his congregation that "getting on a bus and riding over to Soldan (High) can hardly be equated with getting on a bus in Nazi Germany and riding to the gas chamber. It (the current situation) is not all that bad..."

Lewis added he believes the relative calm of the desegregation was brought about by the "good race relations we have had in St. Louis. Baptists always have had good relations, and we at Tower Grove are thoroughly integrated: we have 200 to 300 blacks in our services every Sunday."

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Top Churches Baptize
Inordinate Proportion

By Norman Jameson

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The top five churches accounted for fully one percent of the baptisms recorded by 35,600 Southern Baptist churches in the past five years.

Those churches, which varied annually, baptized 18,410 persons while the rest of the convention baptized 1,856,783. That means 500 churches with a similar average would have accomplished the number of baptisms it took 35,600 to achieve.

First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla.; First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.; and North Phoenix Baptist Church, Phoenix, Ariz., were one-two-three from 1975 to 1978. In 1979, San Jacinto Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas, led with 1,174 baptisms and the other three stayed in order but dropped one notch.

Other churches which occupied occasional space among the top five in that five-year span were Bellevue Baptist, Memphis, Tenn.; Rehoboth Baptist in Tucker, Ga.; Beverly Hills Baptist, Dallas, Texas; First Baptist, Dallas, Texas, and Eastwood Baptist, Tulsa, Okla.

An analysis of the five leading churches over the past 20 years, as determined by church letter statistics, reveals that only 28 churches appear in what is potentially 100 spots.

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First Baptist, Dallas, leads in appearances among the top five with 16, but it did not lead the convention in that 20-year period. First Southern Baptist, Del City, appears in the top five 14 times and led the convention seven times, including five straight years, 1974-78. Only three other churches led as often as twice. They are Tower Grove, St. Louis, 1960, 1962; San Antonio South, 1963, 1966, and First Baptist, Houston, 1971-72.

Except for First, Dallas, and First Southern, Del City, the leaders of the 1960s almost without exception do not appear in the 1970s and the leaders of the '70s are not among the top five in the 1960s.

For example, Mid-City Baptist in New Orleans led the convention with 402 baptisms in 1961 and was among the top five eight times between 1961-69. It hasn't appeared since. First Baptist, Amarillo's four appearances were between 1960-65. North Phoenix has been in the list seven times, all since 1970.

Baptisms by the leading churches have increased dramatically over the past 20 years. In 1960, Tower Grove in St. Louis led the convention with 481. The top five churches averaged 306.

In 1979 when San Jacinto's 1,174 baptisms led the convention, First Southern, Del City, had 1,105 and the top five together averaged 939.

Though the number of baptisms by the top five churches has not increased every year since 1960, the rise has been steady. The average dipped to 288 in 1965; then began a slow growth to 369 in 1970.

In 1971, due primarily to a protracted crusade, First Baptist Church in Houston broke the mythical "thousand" barrier when it baptized 1,669, more than three times as many as second place Mt. View in El Paso, Texas.

It's a record that will stand only until this year's church letters are returned because First Southern, Del City, where Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith is pastor, has already baptized nearly 1,800, including 881 during a three-week summer outdoor crusade.

"Any church will be evangelistic if the pastor teaches it," says Smith. "Leadership is everything. A church will not overcome its pastor."

Smith says people are easier to reach now than ever before, but few churches have a great evangelistic emphasis. People are going to the churches where the gospel is preached and evangelism is emphasized, which gives the few a chance to baptize more, he says.

Two instances graphically illustrate the significance of leadership. Miami Northwest led the convention in baptisms in 1965 under the leadership of Homer Lindsay Jr. When Lindsay went to Jacksonville, Miami Northwest dropped from among the leaders and in 1973, Jacksonville led the convention with 636 baptisms. It's been in the top three ever since.

First Baptist Church in Merritt Island, Fla., led the convention in 1970 with 395 baptisms and was in the first five four times in six years under Adrian Rogers. When Rogers went to Bellevue in Memphis, Merritt Island's baptisms diminished in position and Bellevue shortly appeared near the top.

Evangelism experts and the numbers leaders themselves overwhelmingly cite leadership for the success of churches which baptize large numbers. But John Havlik, director of evangelism education and writing for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, feels that holding the "successful" pastors up as examples of what all pastors and churches should be hurts small churches that Havlik says simply don't have the potential for such growth.

Havlik told a meeting of state convention executive directors, evangelism directors and Home Mission Board staff they were "killing" the small church preachers. "You give these guys (baptism leaders) a platform and if it were up to them, you wouldn't even have a salary next week. They couldn't care less about the Cooperative Program," Havlik said, pointing to the independent orientation of the growth churches and their generally weak support of the Cooperative Program, which funds the convention's missions and education efforts.

Bisagno, the first Southern Baptist pastor to baptize 1,000 persons into his church in a single year, feels the evangelism conference leader trail is legitimate stomping ground for the baptism leaders. "Role modeling is bona fide in every area of life," Bisagno says. "We're inspired to holiness, to witness, to right conduct and to everything good by example."

Bisagno says great evangelistic churches are being built in unlikely places and that people are "100 percent wrong" when they say there are some churches that simply cannot be expected to grow.

Common qualities among the pastors baptizing large numbers, Bisagno says, are: the pastors are all visionary, they want to win the world; their churches are informal and enthusiastic; and they have a priority on evangelizing and training their members to witness.

Roy Fish, professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, echoed Bisagno's claim that the large growth churches emphasize equipping the laity to witness. And he said the training methods are probably superior today than 20 years ago, which is likely one reason for the growing number of baptisms among the leading churches.

But grow as they may, one stark statistic emphasizes the need for continued effort. Since 1960, Southern Baptists have baptized an average of 44 persons every hour. But last year in the United States alone, 390 persons were born every hour.

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'Mama's' Heart
In Foster Care

By Karen Willoughby

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AVONDALE, Colo. (BP)—The state of Colorado stopped counting at 56, but Mama Ortiz knows the number of foster kids she's cared for since 1965 is more like 80.

Twelve children were born into the Ortiz family, eight lived. Mama also raised her grandson.

"Then I had a very lonely life," recalls the finely-drawn Spanish woman. She applied for her foster care license, and the children started coming.

"You wouldn't believe the children," she says. "A five-week-old baby with bruises all over her body. A two-week-old baby so badly beaten nobody else would take her."

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Though crying with hunger, Mrs. Ortiz recalls, that baby refused to eat. She was afraid to have the bottle put to her mouth. So Mama's husband took a soft rag, moistened it with warm milk, and that the baby would suck.

"You'd be surprised how many kids are really neglected," said Mrs. Ortiz. A six and an eight-year-old came to her--neither was toilet trained.

Mama has had children from five days old to 18 years old. For the most part they've been victims of child abuse.

"All kinds," says Mama, "physical, mental, sexual—yes, even with their parents. It's a sad thing."

Mama has cared for many handicapped children, too. "The last one, I ask the caseworker, 'why you bring him to me?' She said it's because I'm so good with them. But, I said, 'Remember, I'm human too. I can only take so much.'"

Mama broke down last winter. Her health gave way after pushing herself for so long. She was hospitalized with emphysema. Since her rest, as she calls it, she is back to taking care of foster kids, but she has put a limit on the ages. Now she'll only take care of eight to 12-year-olds.

"I hated to do it. They need somebody. But when they took my baby from me it broke my heart."

One bright-eyed multi-racial child had been with the Ortiz family for all but five days of her four years. Then she was adopted.

"It broke my heart," she repeated. "I prepare her for two weeks, and she was glad to go. She waved me goodbye. It broke my heart."

Mama Ortiz estimates it takes one month for a child to be helped in her home, and she attributes that to her strictness. When children know their limits, they feel secure.

"I want to make the kids happy. I tell them about the Lord. And you know, when they accept Jesus, they tell their friends."

One of her foster kids started witnessing "left and right," according to Mrs. Ortiz. She won three friends to the Lord, and then her father.

"People tell me I'm crazy to keep taking kids when I was so sick, but I tell you this, I'm going to work until I die at something I like."