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Small Churches in North
Don't Attract SBC Transfer

By Norman Jameson

Migratory habits move the average American 13 times in his lifetime. One in five families moves each year.

For Southern Baptists who end up in northern states where Southern Baptist Convention churches are as scarce as green grass in December, finding a church home is difficult. Kings of the mountain in the South, Southern Baptists are just scratching out a foothold in the North. For example, there are more Southern Baptist churches in Houston, Texas, than in the Northern Plains Convention that encompasses an area larger than eight southern states.

New York Baptist Convention Executive Director Jack Lowndes says about 70,000 Southern Baptists live in his area who have not affiliated with an SBC church. Southern Baptist membership in the convention is about 12,000.

Tom Biles, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Milwaukee, Wis., says his membership of 540 would double in a week if all the Southern Baptists in his area not attending a convention church started coming to Northwest.

Of several reasons that keep lifelong Southern Baptists from joining northern SBC churches, size is foremost; size and its correspondent program lack.

Baptists come north expecting clones of the columned cathedrals in Birmingham, Dallas or Atlanta. But most often the churches, frequently with membership less than 100, meet in a store front, a Masonic lodge, school gymnasium or living room of a couple who are trying to start a chapel.

The overwhelming majority of the churches have just one staff member and he is often bivocational. There likely are no sophisticated programs, no 500-mile mission trips, no youth athletic leagues, choirs, no staff member to give them special attention.

No prestige accompanies membership in a northern Southern Baptist church. It's unlikely your boss would belong to one. Few, if any, of your children's schoolmates would be members.

"Most Southern Baptists who move north have no consciousness of what they'll find," says Cecil Sims, executive secretary-treasurer of the Northwest Baptist Convention. "They come out of a cultural support system that says being Baptist is acceptable and even profitable."

Joyce Martin, minister of education at Merriman Road Baptist Church in Garden City, Mich., says, "Somehow we've got to relay information to the South to tell people what to expect when they come up here. Pastors need to tell their members who are moving that because you are a creative leader you could influence the work in the North."

The issue of Southern Baptists foregoing their traditional church affiliation in favor of other, more well-established but doctrinally different programs is complex.

"I try to analyze, to see if there will ever be a point where we can attract and hold these kinds of creative people," Mrs. Martin says. "I don't know if we will ever reach that point, but if we do, it will probably be many years."

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One reason Southern Baptists new in the area do not join a Southern Baptist church is because they cannot find one. They're not on every corner, or every street or even in every county. The Northern Plains Convention has 153 churches and 52 missions with 23,500 members in an area of 392,764 square miles. Executive Director Roy Owen is closer to his Rapid City, S.D., office when he is in Dallas, Texas, than when he is in the western-most church in the convention.

Vera Appling, who grew up in Southern Baptist churches, couldn't find an SBC church within a reasonable distance of her house when she and her husband Ed moved to Chicago Heights, Ill. Though it was "a frightening experience to change churches after so many years," they joined a Presbyterian church six months after they moved.

For people who use it, a program called "Hello Baptist," administered through local associations and the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., could make getting involved in a local SBC work easier than finding the nearest grocery store.

Some Southern Baptists do involve themselves as soon as they move. They are quickly called on for leadership because the indigenous churches often have not had sufficient time to train leaders.

"They are a tremendous help, the kind of help most of our churches need, strong lay leadership," says Biles in Milwaukee.

Some denomination switchers change because "Even a small church in the heart of the South would have a greater program than most of our churches," says Lowndes.

But there are other reasons. Sims says 50 percent are glad to be free of the cultural bondage of Baptist life in the South.

Adds Otha Winningham, director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Fellowship, "Sometimes when they get away from family, with no social pressures to constrain them, they take a vacation from church and from the Lord."

One former denominational worker who had been a member of four Southern Baptist churches and graduated from a Southern Baptist college, had a fundamental difference with SBC churches but didn't change until she returned to the North. There she joined a Presbyterian church. And, she says, about 100 of the 200 members of her Sunday School class are Baptists.

Northern pastors indicate that Southern Baptist transfers would be better prepared if pastors in the South would prepare them about what to expect. The problem is that pastors in the South do not know enough about the work in the North to explain it to anyone else.

"For instance," says Lowndes, "we have pastors call us who want to bring 150-member choirs through here and have the kids stay in homes. We don't have a church that has that many homes."

Sometimes cultural idiosyncrasies crinkle the foil that missions comes wrapped in.

Mannon Wallace, pastor of Sunnyside Baptist Church in Cheyenne, Wyo., says one lady wanted to come to his "Southern" Baptist church but felt she couldn't because she was not from the South.

He lists other instances that demonstrate the inescapable bias of culture. Literature for young children one Sunday in April told the teachers to go on a nature hike and see the spring flowers blooming. Outside his windows, it was snowing.

And on tape-recorded messages, the prominent southern drawl draws snickers from his Sunday school students. "We're no longer just Southern" he says. "Our literature needs to be pitched to people in all 50 states."

Winningham says 70 to 80 percent of the additions in Southern Baptist churches in his area are from non-Southern Baptist background. "We're not chasing Texas license plates," he says, showing his churches are not "Dixie clubs."

While in Birmingham, Ala., for a meeting, Lowndes, with several other state executive secretaries, visited the worship services of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. After participating in the service in a large, beautiful auditorium, filled with well-dressed, proper worshippers attended by a large staff and entertained with professional quality choirs, Lowndes commented to another northern executive, "this reminds us of just how pioneer we are." (BP)

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(BP) illustration mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

Wallace Prays Assailant
Asks God's Forgiveness

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--George Wallace, treating his stage as a pulpit, told a racially mixed Baptist group he holds no animosity toward the man who shot him nine years ago, ending his national political career and putting him forever in a wheelchair.

"I have forgiven him and prayed to God he has asked forgiveness for himself because you cannot enter the kingdom of God holding animosity toward another individual," said Wallace, wounded in Maryland while campaigning for the presidency.

Wallace, governor of Alabama for five years before he was shot, or "standing up" as he said, and governor for nearly seven years "sitting down," surprised a joint session of the Baptist Public Relations Association and a regional meeting of churches in transitional communities with an address that was more nearly a sermon.

He told the crowd of 300 the shooting taught him the frailty of human life. "One moment you are in perfectly good health and in the twinkling of an eye you can be dead," he said. "In the twinkling of any eye you can be paralyzed."

"I was not the man I should have been," before the assassination attempt, he said. "I learned you should be ready to go at any moment by surrendering your heart to Jesus Christ and asking him to forgive you."

Wallace, a noted segregationist during his days as a powerful Southern politician, said the old way in the South is gone forever. Those who defended the old way thought it right, but were mistaken, he said.

Now the danger of rising racism is not in overt groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party, but "in the latent racism in the hearts of people who do not have the saving grace of Jesus Christ," he said.

Those groups who use the Bible to defend their racism are "deadly wrong" said Wallace, who spoke for only a few minutes to the public relations group on the power of persuasion, then answered questions. "There is nothing in the Bible to indicate you can get in heaven by

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hating anyone because of race, color, creed or national origin."

Wallace feels vindicated, though saddened, by national events, particularly the emergence of crime. The warnings he voiced alone in 1968 and 1972 campaigns that crime would make people captives in their own homes "are now the conventional wisdom of everyone," he said.

Despite the attempt on his own life and the shooting of President Ronald Reagan, Wallace would not speak in favor of handgun controls because he said criminals do not obey regulations anyway. He did say if something had been done 100 years ago "to stop the proliferation of handguns we might not have the problem today."

Wallace, who lives in constant pain from his injury, stayed on stage after his address to listen to a sermon by Emmanuel McCall, director of the black church relations department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. After McCall spoke on the sufficient grace of Christ, he and Wallace embraced and Wallace was wheeled out.

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4 Women, WMU Get
V.T. Glass Awards

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Four women and a Southern Baptist agency received V.T. Glass Awards for their ministries in racial reconciliation during the Churches in Racially Changing Communities conference in Birmingham.

The awards are named for Victor T. Glass, former director of the Home Mission Board's department of cooperative ministries with National Baptists, now called the black church relations department.

Recipients were Claudette Colvin of Andalusia, Ala.; Charlie Mae Pearson and Arvella Turnipseed, both of Atlanta, Ga.; and Carolyn Weatherford and the staff of the Woman's Missionary Union, all of Birmingham.

Colvin resigned with the rest of the staff of an Enterprise, Ala., church in 1971 when the pastor was dismissed for preaching about race, said Emmanuel McCall, director of the black church relations department and presenter of the awards.

After resigning, Colvin helped local black churches organize vacation Bible schools and trained leaders for them. She also "helped young people who otherwise had no opportunity to get out of Enterprise," McCall said, adding she now emphasizes racial reconciliation through her work in interracial projects in Andalusia.

Pearson, president of the Woman's Missionary Convention of the General Missionary Baptist Convention, was an SBC home missionary before retirement. Working in cooperation with the Woman's Missionary Union of the Georgia Baptist Convention, she has done "an extensive amount" of work in racial reconciliation ministries through joint mission activities, McCall said.

Turnipseed came to the Home Mission Board in 1964 and was Glass' secretary for 11 years. Now orders processing clerk at the board, she was the first black to serve any SBC agency in any capacity other than custodial help, McCall said.

"She made friends and destroyed some of the myths white people had about black people," McCall added. "And she saw to it that other black people came to the board."

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Weatherford, executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union, began reconciling racial relationships while she was the WMU executive for Florida Baptists, McCall said.

Since she has been in her present position, she has "given tremendous emphasis to racial reconciliation ministries" and given the black church relations department its "highest profile in history," he added.

McCall also presented an award to "all the WMU staff, and especially the editorial staff," noting the agency has published more than 18 periodicals in recent years that have emphasized race relations and "lifted up the ministry of racial reconciliation."

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Union University To House
Robert G. Lee Memorial

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JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--The Robert G. Lee Memorial Library will be established at Union University as part of a \$1.75 million drive to expand campus facilities.

Included in the extensive collection is Lee's personal desk, chair, two floor lamps, numerous pictures from the walls of his study, awards and momentos, nearly 30 scrapbooks, and the library.

Totaling about 3,200 volumes, the library has been in storage since Lee's death in 1978 at the age of 91. Union, which was named in the prominent Southern Baptist pulpiteer's will as beneficiary of the library, has lacked space to properly display the items.

"We are grateful for Dr. Lee's generosity in allowing Union to be the recipient of such a valuable gift as his library," said Union President Robert Craig. "This gift will serve as a lasting tribute to Dr. Lee's ministry and will inspire future Southern Baptists for decades to come."

Lee, a Union trustee, was pastor of Memphis' Bellevue Baptist Church from 1927 to 1960. During that time, the membership grew to more than 9,000, making Bellevue the largest Southern Baptist church east of the Mississippi River.

He led Tennessee Baptists as state convention president from 1931-35, and was president of the Southern Baptist Convention 1949-51. His sermon "Pay Day, Someday," was delivered over 1,200 times and he wrote 53 books.

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