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Allen Declares Hunger Still on God's Agenda

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In the midst of a national trend toward "withdrawal from confrontation with human need," Southern Baptists must remember the issue of world hunger remains "a major priority on God's agenda for the 1980s," according to Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

Allen told students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that most Americans are preoccupied with taking care of themselves. But the former Southern Baptist Convention president predicted the current trend "won't last long" in the religious community.

"I don't see the present mood as permanently disengaging us from the plight of the poor and hungry," he said. "The gospel just won't let that happen."

Allen, Southern's guest for "Hunger Emphasis Week," challenged Christians to adopt "God's eye view of life," which focuses on the world's needy. "God always has his radar set on the weak and helpless, and he champions their cause," Allen said.

Although the world hunger problem has elicited a "tremendous grassroots response," Allen claimed many Christians still haven't confronted some important dimensions of the issue.

"A lot of folks who say they believe the right to food is a basic human right haven't thought through what that means," he said. "It means that hungry people deserve food, regardless of their economic, political or religious orientation. A lot of people who talk about feeding the hungry are speaking only of those folks who aren't threatening to us politically or economically."

Allen alluded to recent remarks by several members of the Reagan administration about using food as a "political weapon" in United States foreign policy. "The issue," he said, "is whether we are going to do war by torture. The American society is the largest producer of food in the world. When we talk about using food as a weapon, we're talking about torturing little children to death, because it is children, for the most part, who are starving."

Although God possesses "infinite patience in leading his people to his agenda," Southern Baptists must respond to the world hunger crisis or "God will go somewhere else to get his work done," Allen warned. "I believe a fundamental issue for us today is human survival, and hunger—along with war—is the pivotal concern in that issue."

Baptists Win
Five RPRC Awards

WASHINGTON (BP)--Southern Baptists won five awards, including a "Best in Class" grand prize, in the annual Victor DeRose-Paul M. Hinkhouse awards competition of the Religious Public Relations Council.

Also, Tom Brannon, director of public relations for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, was re-elected president of the international organization and W.C. Woody, vice president for special projects for the SBC Radio and Television Commission, was elected to the Board of Governors.

Robert O'Brien, overseas news coordinator for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and former news editor of Baptist Press, won three of the awards, including "Best of Class" in writing.

O'Brien's story in The Commission magazine, "Ge Vang's Long Road," about the plight of a Hmong refugee family from Laos, won the award of excellence in the feature category and the DeRose-Hinkhouse award as "Best of Class" in writing. O'Brien was chairman of the refugee committee at First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., which sponsored the Ge Vang family. Vang is currently employed at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

O'Brien also won the award of excellence in public relations campaigns for "The Million Dollar Campaign," an effort he spearheaded to help restore a \$20,000 income tax exclusion for charitable workers overseas.

Linda Brown of the Baptist World Alliance in Washington won second place in the public relations campaign category for her efforts portraying the BWA meeting in Toronto last year as "More Than a Meeting."

Don Fearheiley of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville earned second place in the television series category for the weekly Bible study program, "At Home with the Bible."

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Brotherhood Staffer
Takes Missions Post

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4/16/81

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--James W. Hatley, director of world missions conferences for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission for almost five years, will become executive director of missions of the Austin (Texas) Baptist Association May 1.

Hatley, 57, in addition to directing world missions conferences at the commission, also was responsible for associational missions relations. He has been active in the Shelby County Baptist Association and was chairman of the stewardship and finance committee when he accepted the new assignment.

Hatley has been a home missionary to Spanish-speaking people in Arizona, director of missions in Magic Valley Baptist Association in Texas and rural-urban missions consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

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

Retirement Homes
Director Resigns

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Charles E. Neal, 53, has resigned as president of the Virginia Baptist Homes Inc., and, according to an announcement by trustees, entered a psychiatric treatment facility.

M. Hunter Riggins, chairman of trustees, announced Neal's resignation and said the administrator "has been admitted to Westbrook (Psychiatric) Hospital in Richmond."

Riggins, an automobile dealer in Poquoson, Va., declined to comment further, and told the Religious Herald, journal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia: "The homes will operate in this interim period under Meredith K. Roberson, vice president, who has been elected by the board of trustees to carry out the president's duties."

Virginia Baptist Homes Inc. is an agency of the BGAV, and has some 500 residents in its three locations, Culpeper, Newport News and Richmond. It has a \$7.25 million annual budget and receives an estimated \$375,000 through the Cooperative Program.

Neal, who has been with the homes since 1969, has been chief executive for 12 years. Roberson joined the administrative staff of the homes Nov. 15, 1980, after retirement as pastor of Ridge Baptist Church in Richmond.

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'Bear' Bryant Renews
Baptist College Ties

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4/16/81

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--Legendary football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant, winningest coach of modern times, renewed old ties recently with the Baptist college that gave him his first coaching job in 1936.

Bryant, head football coach at the University of Alabama and a Baptist, was reunited with seven members of that first squad he helped coach nearly a half-century ago at Union University, a school sponsored by the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Union hired Bryant, fresh out of college, to help Athletic Director A.B. Hollingsworth coach the football team. But when Hollingsworth became ill, Bryant took the squad through spring practice in preparation for the upcoming season.

Bryant was at Union just six months before he accepted an offer he said he couldn't refuse—to return to his alma mater, the University of Alabama, to coach.

Though Bryant said the Union family was good to him, he declared, "I'd do the same thing over again under the circumstances."

In reminiscing about his Union days, Bryant recalled going to the movies to see "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" ("I cried like a baby through the entire thing"), playing monopoly with other faculty members, and "paying \$20 a month for an apartment."

While at the reunion, Bryant received Union's first "All-American" Leadership Award and endorsed the college's \$1.75 million fund drive for more facilities.

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Multi-Racial Congregation
Has 'Abundance of Love'

By Kathy Beasley

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)—Southlawn Baptist Church is "unique among churches in Montgomery and Alabama," according to its pastor, Steve Slusher. "The Lord has allowed us to see each other as unique individuals."

Described by Slusher as "multi-racial," Southlawn is the only church in the Alabama Baptist State Convention that has a racially mixed congregation with equal percentages of blacks and whites.

Of the church's 260 resident members, approximately 48 are white, 48 percent black and 4 percent oriental, Slusher said.

Southlawn is named for a south Montgomery community which was originally racially mixed but now is predominantly black.

The church was founded in 1967. Deliberate action to welcome members of all races was taken in 1975 when members voted to "affirm the constitution," which says the purpose of the church is to proclaim the gospel at home and to the world, Slusher said.

The vote was not specifically to open the doors to other races, but to allow "anyone to be part of the congregation," said Slusher, who has been pastor there three and a half years.

Active membership of the church began to drop about six years ago and only about 10 percent of the members on the roll in 1975 still attend.

Three years ago, Slusher said, a "death bell was ringing" and it appeared the church would become all black.

But the trend has changed. Membership is up two straight years. More than half the new members join through baptism.

Credit for the church's growth and success with integration "first goes to the Lord and then to people, as they are willing to be led," Slusher said.

The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board named Southlawn 1980 Church of the Year for the eastern half of the United States for churches in transition.

The arrangement works because members "have such an abundance of love" that enables them to "break down the barriers," Slusher said.

Slusher's wife, who is minister of music and also teaches music in public schools, uses a combination of spirituals, modern black religious music, traditional Baptist songs and country gospel in the service program.

Borrowing from the "cordial" atmosphere he said is part of most all-black services, Southlawn has a "walk around" portion in its morning worship, Slusher said. During a familiar song, members walk around the church to greet each other and guests.

The emphasis of the church's program is evangelism, worship as a celebration and Bible study, Slusher said.

Slusher does not refer to his mixed congregation as "integrated," saying the word lends an impression of a forced or non-voluntary situation. He uses "multi-racial," but "stewpot" is his favorite descriptive phrase.

"Everything in a stew maintains its own identity. Each is still an individual, but the flavor has been enhanced when they are united together," Slusher said.

Stereotypes that one race imagines in another "break down fast when you start dealing with people as individuals," said the 30-year-old Virginia native. "Here we don't talk black-white. Here we talk Christian and non-Christian, saved and not saved."

The fellowship of blacks and whites in church may be the beginning of worldwide acceptance among the races, Slusher said.

"The church has to be the place where it starts," he said. "You can legislate equality, but you've got to change somebody's heart first. Through Jesus Christ, hearts can be changed and lives opened up to love."

Slusher said that while it is "ultimately biblical" that churches accept members from all races, he does not recommend that all churches take steps toward that goal now.

"I'm not saying that every church has to or should," he said. "Some are not ready. It was not an easy thing for our church (members) to do. I'm proud of them and very happy to be here."

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Kathy Beasley is a staff writer for the Montgomery Advertiser where this article first appeared. Used by permission.

La. Women Vote
WMU a Department

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4/16/81

MONROE, La. (BP)--Louisiana Baptist women during their annual meeting voted 312 to 31 to accept their executive committee's recommendation that Woman's Missionary Union become a department of the Louisiana Baptist Missions Division.

The move, under study for more than two years, will change WMU from an auxiliary to a department if the Louisiana Baptist executive board ratifies the action at its May meeting.

Miss Kathryn Carpenter, WMU executive director, said the program of WMU will remain essentially the same. "We will have a council to plan and promote our work instead of a board and Camp Tall Timbers will be under the LBC executive board with WMU having priority for its use and for maintaining the calendar of other meetings."

She explained that throughout the Southern Baptist Convention 22 states have WMU departments and 12 have auxiliaries.

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