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After Radio Worship Scrapped,
Church Scores with Talk Show

By Bob E. Mathews

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. (BP)—On Aug. 23, for the first time in about 50 years, the morning worship service of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, was not broadcast on radio.

A change in formats at station KOMA which had broadcast the church's service since 1931 took the church off radio, though morning services are still telecast.

Pastor Gene Garrison told members, "Audience ratings do not indicate that the weekly broadcast of our worship service is the wisest and best use of our time and money."

Faced with the change, Garrison and church leaders decided to take KOMA's offer of an alternate time and to try "something radically different."

So at 11 p.m. on a recent Sunday, Garrison went to the KOMA studios for the first broadcast of "Straight Line to the Pastor." KOMA is 1520 on AM dial.

The format calls for a talk show where listeners call in and talk with Garrison on the air. . . no long preaching, no long songs.

Garrison, "frightened to death" and wondering who would be listening from 11 to midnight, hit the air "cold," no theme music, no introduction. Just "Good evening, I'm Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and the name of the program is Straight Line to the Pastor. Our phone number is 460-1520." He opened his Bible, read a few verses of Scripture and made a few comments while keeping an eye on the phone lights.

By 11:05 the lines lit up and the calls started coming. The first caller, a young woman, asked how to pick the right church or denomination.

Garrison explained that a personal faith in Jesus as her Savior is more important than a certain church and that she should attend where the doctrine is true to the Scriptures, where she could be fed spiritually and have her needs met.

Garrison's concern about getting calls was for naught. During the hour the longest time without a call was less than two minutes. Listeners called from the metropolitan area, Enid, northern Kansas and Colorado Springs, Colo. The Colorado caller was the manager of a Christian radio station who complimented Garrison on his new venture and his handling of the new format.

In all, 21 calls were answered during the 58 minutes he was on the air. Subjects discussed by Garrison and the listeners included "sinless perfection," abortion, homosexuals, "know-it-all Baptists," the Ku Klux Klan using the Bible as justification of its deeds, a Christian dating a non-Christian, unmarried people living together and backsliding.

The bulk of callers seemed to be people seeking straight answers to serious questions and probably taking advantage of the opportunity to talk to a minister while remaining anonymous.

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Only one or two tended to be argumentative and Garrison deftly handled their calls, managing to keep them from dominating the time.

A minister who had been fired from his church and divorced from his wife talked with Garrison about unkind Christians and "no good" church members. Garrison suggested they meet for coffee and discuss the minister's problems in person. (Later the minister, now working in the oil industry, made a luncheon appointment with Garrison.)

After the first program, Garrison wrote in his church paper, "It is easy to see what kind of ministry this can become. People are grappling with personal problems, seeking someone to talk with them and respond to their needs."

During daytime hours when KOMA was broadcasting the church worship service, its signal covers 66 of Oklahoma's 77 counties. But at night the western half of the United States receives the 50,000-watt signal.

Radio and Television Commission marketing director Claude Cox urged the church to accept the station's offer of the alternate time despite its late hour, noting that KOMA's signal covers 22 states and has a listening audience of one million people.

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Southern Baptists Enter
55 Counties Since 1979

Baptist Press
9/9/81

ATLANTA (BP)—Since 1979, Southern Baptists have started new churches and missions in 55 counties where they had no work before, leaving 512 counties in the nation with no Southern Baptist church or mission, according to a Home Mission Board report.

The 1981 update on unentered counties (those without an SBC church or mission) shows "Bold Mission Thrust has had a definite effect on starting new work, especially in pioneer areas," said Clay Price, author of the report and HMB missions researcher.

But his findings also suggest it will be "harder and harder to enter some counties in the future, especially rural counties with very small populations and a strong church of a denomination with beliefs similar to ours," Price said.

Consequently, he noted, "We may begin focusing more of our resources on major metropolitan areas where the needs are more pressing."

The first study of unentered counties in 1973 found 832 counties without SBC churches. In 1975, the number fell to 585. By 1979, there were 542 counties across the nation without a Southern Baptist church or mission.

The 1981 report reveals that while new work was begun in 55 previously unentered counties, churches or missions in 25 other counties had disbanded since the 1979 count, resulting in a net drop of 30 in the number of unentered counties.

Price attributed the deaths of SBC churches or missions in those 25 counties to "natural causes," such as pastors or church families moving out of the area.

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Just over half (52 percent) of the remaining unentered counties are in five of 28 states: Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and South Dakota.

The 1981 survey shows that 1.5 million people have gained access to a county SBC church or mission since 1979, while approximately 10.3 million people, or five percent of the U. S. population, are still without a Southern Baptist church in their area.

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Independent Study Spurt
Leads Seminary Extension

Baptist Press
9/9/81

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Enrollments in courses offered through the Seminary Extension Independent Study Institute increased 32 percent over 1980-81.

The increase brought to 2,573 the number of pre-college or college-level theological courses begun between Aug. 1, 1980, and July 31, 1981. Interest in this correspondence arm of the Seminary Extension Department is evidenced by a near doubling of requests for catalogs or other information.

Seminary Extension students were reported at 401 centers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and 27 foreign countries. The number of centers is four greater than the previous high, recorded last year.

Seminary Extension centers are locally sponsored ministry training centers, usually maintained by Baptist associations. The tally of centers begins anew every August, based on orders for course materials received by the Seminary Extension Department. There is no automatic carryover from one year to the next.

James L. Ryan, director of extension center education for the department, sees several factors involved in the continuing growth.

"Baptist associations are assuming more responsibility for the training of their people-- both pastors and laymen," he says. "A Seminary Extension center is one of the tools uniquely suited to help them in that training."

Ryan also believes that a greater awareness within the denomination of the need for continuing education for ministers has contributed to the growth of Seminary Extension through both delivery systems.

A third factor, says Ryan, is the impact of Bold Mission Thrust, the Southern Baptist Convention's emphasis on sharing the Christian gospel with every person on the earth by the year 2000. "Laymen have been hearing us tell them that they need to be involved in ministry, too," Ryan says. "They are excited to find in Seminary Extension a means of equipping themselves for service."

The Seminary Extension Department is part of the Seminary External Education Division, sponsored by the six seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Cancer Claims
Elder Lindsay

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)—Homer G. Lindsay Sr., pastor, co-pastor, then pastor emeritus of Jacksonville's First Baptist Church for 41 years, died Sept. 5 of cancer. He was 78.

A native of Tennessee, Lindsay was president of both the Tennessee and Florida Baptist Conventions, chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee in 1957, and first vice president of the SBC, 1954-55.

He was a graduate of Carson Newman College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and was pastor of churches in Texas, Tennessee and Florida.

In 1969, when Lindsay was 66, the church called his son, Homer G. Lindsay Jr., as co-pastor. The two served together until 1973 when Lindsay Sr. became pastor emeritus. First Baptist, Jacksonville, with 3,500 members in 1969, now has 12,194 members.

Lindsay is survived by his wife, Ruth; son, Homer Jr.; two sisters and a brother. A daughter, Jo Ann, died of cancer earlier this year.

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TV, Media Library Join Efforts
To Improve Outreach, Training

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
9/9/81

LAKE CHARLES, La. (BP)--For 16 years, Trinity Baptist Church has broadcast its Sunday morning worship services.

Only recently, however, has the church linked the television ministry with a media library ministry in an effort to improve and expand outreach and training.

While broadcasting is "old hat," the creative use of television and multiple use of videotapes through the media library "is pretty new to us," says Wayne Blankenship, the pastor. "We're still in the genesis stage."

Such cooperative efforts between telecommunications and media library ministries of Southern Baptist churches may be the wave of the future as plans are being made for a denominational telecommunications network by 1984.

At Trinity, two workers, Phyllis Tadlock, media services director, and Wayne Eskridge, director of television ministries, decided a year ago that cooperative work with videotapes would be in the best interests of everyone.

The church had a growing collection of videotapes, but they were inaccessible in a locked television booth. In the cooperative effort, the collection would be catalogued and made available. And, since some of the 10 media services personnel also work on the TV production crew, videotaping of worship services and special services could be done by the media service staff.

Today, the media center houses tapes of the most recent 20 weeks' Sunday morning services, a collection of taped witnessing classes led by the minister of outreach and other special programs. Viewing of tapes in the media center has maintained a steady pace,

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with individuals and groups of up to 10 persons regularly using the service.

Each week the church staff critiques taped services, making suggestions to increase their effectiveness. Also, members who miss services or special programs use videotapes for personal growth and training.

A unique service being provided on a cost recovery basis is videotaped weddings.

Recently, videotaped messages from Blankenship were used in homes throughout the Lake Charles area during "cottage prayer meetings" prior to a revival.

Four of Blankenship's sermons were re-recorded on two tapes for missionaries in Kenya to use as examples of church services in the U.S.

By linking the work of the television ministry and the media services ministry, Blankenship feels the church members are "more aware of media. The media center is a failure unless we can get the people to use the materials and to take the resources outside the walls of the church," he said.

Mancil Ezell, secretary of the Baptist Sunday School Board's church media library department, said that "the advent of telecommunications and the video cassette has increased the potential for an even greater variety of Christian education and growth experiences. Just as Trinity Baptist has found," he said, "the media library can serve in all churches to expand video use in church programming."

Blankenship looks forward to the day when church members and leaders can take advantage of training opportunities beamed to the church from the Sunday School Board.

In the meantime, he is concerned with broadcasts from the church to the Lake Charles area. He feels strongly that the Sunday morning worship services are reaching shut-ins and others who have a religious orientation, but that the telecasts "reach very few lost people." For this reason, one of his dreams is that creative programming, including a talk show format, can be developed locally to reach the unsaved.

Other local programming may expand to include videotaped commercials for the church, counseling and Bible study involvement for home viewers, and programs on the church's ministries for new members to view in the media center.

"There's no limitation on what we can do with the television ministry and media services working together," said Blankenship. "All we need is a little more time, a little more money and more people to work."