



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 29, 1981

81-168

Middlesboro Church Booted From Kentucky Association

MIDDLESBORO, Ky. (BP)--First Baptist Church of Middlesboro has been disfellowshipped by the Bell Baptist Association on charges the congregation practices alien immersion.

The action came during the association's annual meeting Oct. 16, and culminated a year-long deliberation over a policy of the Middlesboro congregation that receives as members those of other faiths without regard to mode of baptism.

Pastor John Pennington and other messengers from the church attended the first session of the annual meeting, answering the roll call of messengers.

However, a motion was made and passed that messengers from all churches but Middlesboro First Church be seated.

In a subsequent action, the credentials committee presented a recommendation "that the Bell Association of Baptists disassociates itself from the First Baptist Church of Middlesboro until such time as that congregation elects to realign itself with the doctrinal stance of member churches of the Bell Association of Baptists."

In the same motion, messengers committed themselves to continued prayer for the church and for the day when unity and harmony between the association and the church may return.

Both parts of the motion were adopted.

Pastor Pennington, in a statement to the association, said he does not believe the church has strayed from Baptist principles in their membership policy. "Our policy is that we receive as members any Christian who has received believers' baptism, regardless of mode," he said, adding that "our Baptist forefathers in England stressed 'believers' baptism rather than the mode."

Pennington said the church does not "sprinkle or pour" and "shall continue to immerse all requesting baptism."

The difference surfaced in the 1980 annual meeting, and the credentials committee, headed by Wayne Morgan, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Middlesboro, was charged with investigating allegations of doctrinal deviation by First Church.

A meeting was held, and it was reported the First Church had adopted a policy whereby a person could seek membership in the church upon previous baptism, regardless of mode.

The report was heard in the November 1980 meeting of the association's executive committee, but action was postponed until the 1981 annual meeting.

Jim Cox, pastor of West Pineville Baptist Church and associational moderator, declined to comment, saying he did not want to further irritate the situation. He added there are no ill feelings toward First Church or Pennington, but that the action was felt necessary because the church refused to change its policies which were in direct conflict with the doctrinal position of the association.

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Blind Writer's Ministry
Helps Give Spiritual Light

by Carol Sisson

Baptist Press
10/29/81

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The prayer of a writer who cannot see is that God will use her talent to bring light to someone in spiritual darkness.

Blind since birth, Helen Parker of Louisville, Ky., has met life's every challenge with her own special brand of down-to-earth determination.

When at 61 she first was encouraged to write professionally, her immediate reaction was, "What in the world would I write about?"

She felt she led a rather routine life. A braille proofreader for the American Printing House for the Blind. A wife. A Sunday School teacher. Active in Woman's Missionary Union. Nothing which she thought would be of much interest to others.

Yet the idea had been planted; she could not resist the challenge. After her first article was printed in 1976 in a Sunday School Board publication, Parker says she "got writer's ink in her blood."

She has since written for Open Windows, Home Life, Mature Living, Royal Service, the Upper Room, Louisville Courier-Journal, and others.

Her articles show how churches can help the visually handicapped, and include children's stories, devotional material, leadership articles and articles for Christian singles.

Devotional materials, her favorite, draw response from around the world. The letters tell her that something she is saying is touching other lives.

"My writing is my Christian ministry, a way to witness to lots of people," she said.

Beyond that Parker has used her writing income to help buy scholarships for students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who hope to become missionaries.

"All my life I had always wanted to help someone else go to college. If someone hadn't given me a scholarship, I couldn't have gone," she explained.

College proved an especially ominous challenge for Parker. After attending high school at the Kentucky School for the Blind, there were fears about competing with sighted students and about being accepted socially.

A good self-image, credited to her "very wise mother," and an intense desire for education enabled her to overcome these misgivings.

True to her mother's predictions, Parker has had a rich, full life despite blindness. Of the obstacles she has overcome she says simply, "everyone has obstacles."



-- FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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October 29, 1981

81-168

Trucker Chaplain
Touches Real Lives

By Bill Bangham

MEMPHIS (BP) -- Beyond the popular music cliches that picture long-haul truckers as heroic, two-fisted, carefree, independent knights of the road lay the real lives of the 20 million men and women drivers of the trucking industry.

"The image of the carefree and independent life isn't all it appears to be on the surface," says Fred Wright, a trucker chaplain. "There are long periods of separation from family and friends. I met one trucker who had not been home for six months. It's also a dangerous profession.

"Oh sure, there is a great deal of personal satisfaction sitting behind the wheel of one of those big rigs, running down the road with it under your control, but you're not your own boss even if you own it. Someone is always telling you to be such and such a place at such and such a time and to have your load somewhere else by another time."

Wright, a long-haul trucker since 1978, is or was an accounting executive for an oil company in Oklahoma City before becoming a trucker, a move he says was God's call in his life.

Wright had been active in another denomination, but he joined a small Southern Baptist church and almost simultaneously heard a call to preach. He began preparing himself through correspondence courses from the SBC Seminary External Education Division, was ordained and began pastoring small churches around Oklahoma.

To supplement his income, he trained to become a short-haul driver in his area, but a shift in the economy made that impossible. He bought a large rig, took a leave of absence from his church and began long-haul driving.

It soon became apparent that he could not continue as pastor of the church and he resigned. There followed a long period of doubt and he began to question his decision.

"I really wondered whether I had abandoned my ministry," he says, "But then the Lord opened my eyes and I began to see a new mission field; my fellow truckers."

Wright became involved with a group called Transport for Christ, an interdenominational, Christian fellowship which seeks to minister to the long-haul trucker.

He carries a Transport for Christ card which states they have commissioned him a highway evangelist.

When Wright pulls into a truckstop and shuts down for an evening or a weekend, he first goes to the manager and introduces himself. Some will give him a room in which to conduct services; most will allow him to display the two signs he carries that say he is available for services, Bible study and counseling and he is often called.

"If you want to get an idea of the magnitude of the trucking industry, visit a truckstop for a few hours," he says. "At the larger ones there are always a couple of hundred trucks parked day and night, and they are constantly moving. There is the constant rumble of idling diesels. They don't stay parked long.

"Drivers are pulling in to refuel, shower, sleep, eat and do laundry. Prostitution, drugs and alcohol abuse are a reality. The men and women are lonely and many have severe problems. The economy and inflation have made it hard to keep their trucks on the road, support the family at home and maintain themselves while they are away. Many are fatigued from pushing themselves to the limit.

"You will soon see why I say my ministry is a chaplaincy. If these truckstops were military bases we would have chaplains at them."

From his experiences, Wright was instrumental in establishing one of the first permanent Southern Baptist witnesses to the trucking industry. Capitol Baptist Association supports a chapel in cooperation with Transport for Christ at a truckstop northwest of Oklahoma City which is manned by two Mission Service Corps volunteers.

Wright has some concrete suggestions for Baptists who would minister to the trucking industry.

"Many truckstop operators welcome volunteers at their places," he says. "They recognize the problems and really care about the men and women they are in business to serve. Some will make space available for services and Bible study, and almost all welcome volunteers available for counseling and just listening. Truckers may seem a bit rough at first, but they're good people who need friends and someone to talk with too.

"A shuttle service to Sunday worship would also be welcome. Some drivers will walk or hitch-hike in to services, but most don't bother because its hard to maneuver an 18-wheeler on a church parking lot," he says with a grin.

"And don't forget about those who live in your community," he continues. "It's frustrating when problems arise at home and you are hundreds of miles from your family. It's good to know there are friends who will help.

"Don't be put off by a driver's gruffness when he returns home. He's tried and it takes a few days to shake off the road and become civil again."

Wright recently left the road, hired a driver for his rig and has begun driving a mobile chapel for Transport for Christ.

When he talks about the future, he points to it and says, "Someday I'd like to see one of those with 'A Ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention' painted on the side. And when I do, I'd like to be driving it."

Woman Is Re-Elected
By Nevada Convention

CARSON CITY, Nev. (BP) -- Beverly McLeroy, of Las Vegas, was re-elected to a full term as president of the Nevada Baptist Convention during its annual session at First Southern Baptist Church.

McLeroy, who was elected first vice president at last year's convention, became president in December when president Adrian Hall resigned to accept a position on the state staff.

With her re-election, she becomes the first woman in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention to be elected to a full term as president in a convention which is aligned only with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Two women have been elected presidents of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, which is dually aligned with the SBC and with the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

McLeroy, 38, is wife of Jim McLeroy, pastor of Southern Baptist Church of Las Vegas, and has been a member of the convention's executive board.

Nevada Baptists, holding their third annual meeting, also elected Stanley Unruh, pastor of Las Vegas' Sunrise Baptist Church, as first vice president, and John Ashcraft, pastor of Walker Lake Baptist Church of Hawthorne, as second vice president.

The 151 registered messengers adopted a \$679,451 budget, of which \$272,660 will come from the 97 churches and missions affiliated with the SBC's newest state convention. Messengers also upped the percentage they contribute through the national Cooperative Program, going from 14 percent to 16 percent. They will contribute \$43,625, as compared with \$32,200.

The 1982 annual meeting will be held Oct. 26-27, in First Southern Baptist Church of Las Vegas.