

**(BP)****BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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JUL 6 1982

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July 2, 1982

82-96

Baptists Seek Solutions  
to U.S. Economic Troubles

By Michael Tutterow

ATLANTA (BP)—The largest Protestant group in the United States, Southern Baptists, are particularly accountable for ministering to persons affected by the economic crunch, according to Paul Adkins, Christian social ministries director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Adkins' comments came on the heels of a resolution passed during the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, encouraging churches "to seek viable ways" to best assist persons caught up in the throes of the present economic crisis."

Birmingham Baptists are beginning to respond to that responsibility.

Birmingham (Ala.) Baptist Association already has formed a committee to explore the problems of unemployment and to suggest possible church responses. Wallace Henley, author of the SBC resolution on concern for the unemployed, that was adopted in New Orleans and pastor of McElwain Baptist Church in Birmingham, chairs the committee.

Increases in unemployment and loss of social services benefits have placed a heavy drain on many Baptist center resources such as food and clothing, Adkins said. Several New Orleans centers, lacking space to accommodate additional homeless men and women, report turning away persons.

Adkins suggested Baptist churches provide counseling for the unemployed and assistance in developing new job skills and making employment contacts. He encouraged churches to tap resources among church members in creating jobs, offering placement help and providing basic medical services for unemployed persons and their families. "We can't let them suffer because they don't have money," Adkins said.

Adkins also urged denominational leaders to discuss ways SBC agencies can cooperate with churches ministering to jobless Americans.

"Whether we agree with it (the policies) or not, we're passing through an economic evolution where public sector responsibilities are shifting to the private sector," Henley said. "And the church is the private sector."

Henley urged Baptist churches to go beyond "concern" to adopt unemployed families and provide financial assistance until the family secures self-supporting employment. The idea offers only short-term relief, he admitted.

A long-range proposal suggests creating an associational trust fund to finance short-term employment for people most drastically affected. Henley pointed to local Baptist projects, like construction needs at a Baptist camp, as possible short-term employment.

The Birmingham committee has yet to make any formal recommendations to the association, said Henley, a former White House aide and assistant during the early years of the Nixon administration, and a former religion editor for the Birmingham News.

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Henley said similar trust funds could be established by states conventions to assist those associations most impacted by unemployment. He also encouraged denominational efforts, calling for the SBC president to "appoint a task force on the unemployed to survey and suggest ways churches may assist those most deeply affected by unemployment." That motion, presented at the SBC in New Orleans, is scheduled for consideration during the SBC Executive Committee's September meeting.

Birmingham, already plagued with double-digit unemployment, received another economic blow with a recent U.S. Steel announcement that it will furlough 3,500 workers. Henley explained the plant's closing has produced "a rippling effect," forcing the closure of other steel-related businesses.

Tom Roote, Birmingham association's director of missions, said the plant closing has "its tentacles everywhere," yet the association still reports an increase in Cooperative Program gifts.

Roote has encouraged churches to beef-up "no-questions-asked" food pantries and other ministries to assist families in need, but lamented, "I don't think the church can manufacture jobs."

Adkins echoed Roote's sentiments. "The church cannot settle this economic problem," he warned. "Individual church members must become aware of what's happening in their communities." Changes, he added, must then come through Baptists' involvement in the political process.

Baptists' active participation in that process, said Adkins, is consistent with Baptists' stands on justice. "Because of our Christian heritage and basis for ministry, we should get involved (politically) to demonstrate that we believe in the Bible," he concluded. "If healing comes, it will have to come in that manner."

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Mexican Baptist  
Challenge Texas

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press  
7/2/82

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The president of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico has challenged Texas Baptists to send 3,000 volunteers to share their faith in Mexico in 1983.

Speaking to about 1,500 people at the annual meeting of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas at Fort Worth, Alejandro Zamora of Mexico City said, "Mexico is an open door for evangelism by Texas Baptists."

The Texas Baptist Executive Board recently accepted an invitation to join the National Baptist Convention of Mexico and Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in a three-year evangelistic partnership.

Mexico Baptists have set a goal to increase from 480 churches to 2,000 by the end of the century.

Coincidentally, the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas adopted a goal of 2,000 Hispanic churches in Texas by the year 2000 at the meeting in Fort Worth. There are about 700 Spanish-speaking Baptist churches in Texas, affiliated both with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas.

The convention underscored its support of the mission efforts by electing international evangelist Rudy Hernandez of Catarina in South Texas as president.

Hernandez succeeds El Paso physicist Ricardo Pena, who issued the challenge to have 2,000 churches by the year 2000 in his presidential address at the opening session June 28.

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Hernandez said his priorities as president will be to help reach the goals of 2,000 churches in both Texas and Mexico. Also he hopes to influence greater use of mass media in getting "the message of hope and peace through Christ to the greatest number of people in the least amount of time." The Southern Baptist Convention has a goal to reach every person on earth with the gospel by the year 2000.

Hernandez, a former associate in the Texas Baptist Evangelism Division, Dallas, won a runoff election with pastor Leopoldo Samaniego of Laredo.

In asking for 3,000 Texas Baptist volunteers next year, Zamora noted that most of Mexico is totally open to the gospel.

"Combining the resources of Texas Baptists with the enthusiasm of Mexico Baptists will provide marvelous results for the Lord," said Zamora.

"We have a great opportunity to reach many people before the opportunity is lost," said Zamora, "but we must take advantage of the opportunity before its too late." He said Baptist churches in Mexico are increasing at the rate of 10 percent a year.

"We had many opportunities in Cuba, but we didn't do everything we should have done," Zamora added.

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#### India Missionaries Vote To Broaden Ministries

By Anita Bowden

Baptist Press  
7/2/82

BANGALORE, India (BP)--Realizing that 15 percent of the world's population lives in India, Southern Baptist missionaries recently voted to participate in an all-India evangelistic program in an effort to better reach Indians for Christ.

The goal is to make a more effective impact on the country where only 3.4 percent claim to be Christians. Southern Baptist missionaries hope to broaden their evangelistic efforts by working with other Baptists in the country to concentrate work in more responsive areas, better coordinate evangelistic programs and conduct training for church growth.

As a result of a joint meeting in 1981 of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, other Southern Baptists with ministries in India and other Baptist conventions with missionaries in the country, plans have been made to survey the country and determine where cooperation would be beneficial to evangelism.

Centered in the state of Karnataka, where Bangalore is the capital, a leadership training will be directed at church planters who need supplemental training in Baptist doctrine and evangelism and at lay pastors who need training in leading their village congregations. All church members also would receive membership training.

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Murder of Chicago Pastor,  
Wife, Son Shocks Baptists

By Jim Newton

CHICAGO (BP)—The triple murder of a Chicago Southern Baptist pastor, his wife and five-year-old son has left Southern Baptists in Chicago in shock, the director of missions for Chicago Baptist Association said.

Ron Behm, pastor of South Shore Baptist Church, a black congregation active in the association, his wife, Barbara, and son, Matthew, were found stabbed to death by Chicago police at North Avenue Beach early Thursday morning, July 1.

Later in the day, Behm's stepson, 26-year-old Herschel Jackson, confessed to the triple slaying after questioning by police. He was charged with three counts of murder.

Southern Baptists in Chicago have been "shocked and dismayed" by news of the murders, said Everett Anthony, director of the association. Describing Behm as "deeply committed to the black community" and to "bridging the racial gaps" in Chicago, Anthony said Behm was active in the association as Christian social ministries committee chairman.

According to police reports, Jackson, son of Barbara Behm by a previous marriage, had earlier argued with his parents because of her insistence that the unemployed man be home by 10 o'clock each night and that he stay off the streets.

Behm, white pastor of a black Southern Baptist church, was working on an enclosed porch Tuesday evening when Jackson confronted him. Police said Jackson told them he was outraged by the curfew and stabbed the pastor a dozen times with a seven-inch butcher knife and then stabbed to death five-year-old Matthew sleeping in a bedroom.

Police said Jackson told them he then watched television until Barbara, who is black, returned at 10 p.m., and murdered her in the living room.

Police said Jackson told them he dragged the bodies down the back steps of their second-floor apartment, stacked them on the back seat of a leased station wagon, and left the car with the bodies and keys inside at a nearby park, hoping someone would steal the car.

The next night, he returned to the park when newscasts did not mention discovery of the bodies, and drove the car to North Avenue Beach where police found the bodies at 2:40 a.m. Later, he confessed to police his role, after changing his story several times.

Police records indicate Jackson had been arrested three times in recent years for disorderly conduct, possession of marijuana, and for resisting arrest.

Anthony said Behm was deeply concerned about his stepson's problems, adding Behm had told him Jackson had been on drugs and had been treated for mental illness.

Anthony urged Baptists to pray for the family and church, and especially for the Behm's nine-year-old daughter, Rhonda, who was away at church camp at the time of the murders.

The Sunday before the tragedy, South Shore Baptist Church had celebrated Behm's 13th anniversary as pastor, his only pastorate.

A graduate of McCormick and Trinity seminaries in the Chicago area with an earned doctorate, Behm was the author of a book on race, "Is Your God Too Black?" and co-author of another book, "Your God Is Too White."



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