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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Miami Churches Win  
Tax Exemption Plea

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By Craig Bird

MIAMI, Fla. (BP)--Central Baptist Church, which won a drawnout court tax case 10 years ago, joined with two other downtown Miami churches to resist another attempt to tax church property and apparently has won again.

"They (the county) came in and even measured my study and the sanctuary to figure out tax assessment," Conrad Willard, pastor of Central Baptist, explained. The city and county are seeking to generate revenue to finance what has become popularly known as the "Peopl Mover," an 20-mile, elevated train system to provide mass transit in downtown Miami.

The three churches--First United Methodist, Gesu Catholic Church and Central--estimate they would each face massive tax liabilities ranging between \$20,000 and \$40,000 annually for the 15 years of the bond issue and would be forced to seriously curtail or eliminate some of their ministries to the community. Additionally, there was concern over government efforts to tax churches as if they were businesses and assess church property at the same rate (estimated at 20 to 27 cents a square foot) as businesses.

Willard wrote both mayors (Miami and Dade County) a letter reminding them of the earlier case which went to the U.S. Supreme Court and culminated in 1972 with a ruling the city had to repay Central Baptist Church \$50,000 it had paid under protest on taxes on its parking lot. Miami Herald religion writer Adon Taft also publicized the conflict, pointing out the beneficial role the churches played in the community and what services might have to be cut.

"We have more than 130 men in our indigent ministry, we provide food and shelter for those needing it, a counseling service, a weekly noontime Bible study and luncheon for downtown work rs and community organizations use our facilities for meetings," Central's associate pastor Doyle Wetherington told the journalist.

Forewarned by Willard's letter, the newspaper publicity and the efforts of the other ministers and church members, the city council was most receptive when the three pastors led a delegation into the council meeting. "We had barely gotten inside when one councilman made a motion to exempt churches from the tax," Willard said. "But the mayor said in order to make sure things were done properly the attorneys for the churches, the city attorney and the county attorney better work out an agreement."

The lawyers huddled briefly then returned with a proposal. "The city agreed to authorize the creation of a joint tax assessment office with the county on the condition that 'houses of worship or property directly relating thereto' be excluded," Willard explained.

The matter must still be approved by the county board but the county attorney has assured the churches there will be no problem at that point.

Earlier, county officials said the levy was not an advalorem tax even though it was based on "leasable square footage" but was an assessment for services just like sewers or sidewalks. David Eastham, appraisal supervisor, conceded the county was "looking at churches sort of like we're looking at office buildings" even though the churches do not l ase out its space.

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Central's parking lot that is leased out during the week was the subject of the earlier Supreme Court case, will be taxed, "unless we decide to close it off to the public and just use it for church functions," Willard said.

In 1965 county tax officials decided to tax the parking lot as a business but Central contested the decision, arguing the profits from the parking leases were used for religious purposes. The Florida Supreme Court ruled in favor of the church but the Civil Liberties Union took the case to the federal courts charging the exemption violated the First Amendment by aiding one religion and inhibiting another.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case but before it could the Florida legislature changed the state's 19th-century religious tax exemptions. Ultimately the church was refunded taxes it paid before the Florida law was rewritten but it has been taxed since that time.

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Texas Association  
Holds Peace Meeting

By Jerilynn Armstrong

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CORSICANA, Texas (BP)—At what may be the first Baptist associational meeting on peacemaking in the Southern Baptist Convention, some 25 pastors and laypersons gathered in the basement of First Baptist Church of Corsicana to hear four aspects of a Christian's response to peace.

Topics at the meeting, sponsored by Corsicana Baptist Association, ranged from a biblical perspective, the viewpoint from a retired Air Force chaplain, a Christian citizen's response and Southern Baptists' attitude through their history.

Dan Magee, professor of religion at Baylor University in Waco, told the audience that history shows "Southern Baptists have said more about peace than we have done and many of our efforts have been associated with our mission and evangelistic efforts."

Magee added that our Southern Baptist peace and war attitudes fit into the "just (justifiable) war tradition and not the pacifist or holy war attitude."

"An interesting thing taking place at this time is a peace movement in its embryonic stage among Southern Baptists. But the success of this movement will be largely dependent on the degree the Moral Majority and its commitment to nationalism and military defense lays claims on Southern Baptists."

Speaking on a Christian's response to peacemaking, Baylor University graduate student Robert Parham attempted to dispel several misconceptions connected with the peace movement.

"Many people have the precooked idea that pacificism is peacemaking and this is not true. Others believe that participants are soft on communism and the peace movement is orchestrated by the communists. Again this is false," Parham said.

"Peacemaking is not un-American or unpatriotic, instead it is the belief that to trust in a nuclear warhead instead of the Godhead is idolatry.

"As Southern Baptists we must look to the beginning of the peacemaking effort with the birth of the Prince of Peace and reclaim our heritage as peacemakers," he said.

Parham shared with the group that the peace movement is advocating the freeze concept which entails the halting of the nuclear arms race at this point and reducing stockpiles through negotiated, verifiable methods with the Soviet Union.

"The freeze concept is not to leave ourselves vulnerable but to protect our self-interest and the interest of the world. In nuclear war no one comes out the winner," he added.

Beginning the meeting, Joe Haag, associate with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, presented a biblical perspective on war and peace.

"Viewing Jesus Christ as the key to Scripture, it is interesting to note that our Messiah did not come to earth as a military or political figure but in the role of the suffering servant.

"Christ's teachings of loving your enemy, turning the other cheek and blessing the peacemakers call each of us as Christians to take a serious look at the topic of peace and our commitment to it," Haag said.

Jimmy Baggett, pastor of First Baptist Church in Frost and a retired chaplain, told the group that he believes war is immoral but a fact of life and as a chaplain he sought to bring "God to man and man to God."

He added the attitude held by many in Washington and one he leans toward is that peace will be resolved from a position of strength and to trust an enemy would be an unwise decision. "As a Christian I would never seek war but at times would find it necessary," he said.

After the meeting John Kinnaird, pastor of Navarro Mills Baptist Church, said: "I appreciated all the facts and statistics and believe they will help me organize some of my thoughts. I am a conservative and patriotic man but believe peace is a worthy cause for a Christian. The freeze concept presented is one I am going to pray about and after tonight one I believe I can support."

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Reagan On America:  
Nation 'Set Apart'

~~Wash.~~ Wash.  
By Stan Hasteley

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MANHATTAN, Kan. (BP)--In one of his most pointed statements on the subject to date, President Reagan declared the United States is a nation "set apart" by God.

Speaking to an enthusiastic audience at Kansas State University during a two-day western political swing, Reagan also reiterated his support for a constitutional amendment returning organized prayer to public school classrooms.

The President's speech, one in the Alfred M. Landon lecture series honoring the former vice-president, consisted mainly of a defense of his troubled economic program.

But in asking the country to maintain faith in his economic program, he also declared: "I have always believed this blessed land was set apart in a special way--that a divine plan placed this great continent here between the oceans to be found by people from every corner of the earth who had a special love for freedom and the courage to uproot themselves, leave homeland and friends to come to a strange land where they have created something new in all the history of mankind, a land where man is not beholden to government, government is beholden to man."

Acknowledging that "we haven't been perfect in living up" to the ideal that "government exists to insure that liberty does not become license to prey on each other," Reagan said the country has "come a long way since those first settlers reached these shores asking nothing more than the freedom to worship God."

What the early settlers sought, he added, was that God "would work His will in our daily lives so America would be a land of fairness, morality, justice and compassion."

Pointing to "thousands and thousands" of laws passed since the nation's founding, Reagan declared: "Yet if we'd simply adhere to the Ten Commandments Moses brought down from the mountain, and the admonition of the Man from Galilee--to do unto others as you would have them do unto you--we might solve an awful lot of problems with a lot less government."

On the volatile subject of prayer in public schools, Reagan repeated his attack on the Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 rulings forbidding government-sponsored religious devotionals in schools, saying: "We are told that to protect the First Amendment we must expel God, the very source of our knowledge, from our children's classrooms."

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In what has become a frequent rhetorical question, he also asked, "But was the First Amendment written to protect the American people from religion or was it written to protect religion from government tyranny?"

"No one will ever convince me that a moment of voluntary prayer can harm a child or threaten a school or state. From the beginning of this administration, I've made it clear I believe America's children have the right to begin their day the same way members of the United States Congress do. The time has come for this Congress to give a majority of American families what they want for their children: a constitutional amendment that will make it unequivocally clear that children can hold voluntary prayer in their schools."

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HMB Commissions 41  
US-2 Missionaries

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ATLANTA (BP)--Forty-one young men and women were commissioned for two years of mission service in 19 states by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here.

Called US-2 missionaries, they will do such work as resort missions, starting new churches, evangelistic outreach, missions work with the deaf, work with Baptist centers, inner city missions, music ministries, youth work and one couple was assigned to help prepare Baptist ministries at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The largest group will serve in the Northeastern United States with four assigned to New York, nine to the New England Baptist Fellowship and two to the Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptist Fellowship. Five were also assigned to California.

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The US-2ers and place of service are:

New England Fellowship: Brent and Lesa Adams of Tunas, Mo., and Erlanger, Ky., to resort missions in Killington, Vt.; Ron and Joyce Oliver of Pineville, La., to student work in Burlington, Vt.; Ron and Lisa Redden of San Marcos, Texas, to student work at the Coast Guard Academy, New London, Conn.; Manner Tyson of Wadesboro, N.C., to inner city work, Waterbury, Conn.; and Twyla Roach of Royal, Ark., and Sandy Phillips of Wellford, S. C., both to do evangelistic work for the New England Baptist Fellowship.

New York: David and Valeska Thompson of Greenville, S. C., and Kansas City, Mo., to church extension work in Carmel; Carolyn West of Brown Summit, N.C., to church extension in Brooklyn, and Mari Ocker of Hutchinson, Kas., youth work, Monticello.

California: Kevin and Brenda Collins of Unionville, Mo., to Los Angeles to work in the 1984 Olympics; Martha McNeil of Waco, Texas, to literacy work, San Francisco; Anita Haydon of Louisville, Ky., to student work at Cal State, Chico, and Jim Arnold of Williamsburg, Ky., to start a new church in Sacramento.

Iowa: Michael and Karla Taylor of Flagstaff and Tuscon, Ariz., to be church starters, Independence; Laura Allen of Chesterfield, Mo., to student work, Cedar Falls, and Dorcas Herring of Charleston, S. C., to evangelism in the state.

Illinois: Rene Shuler of Summerville, S. C., to evangelism in Springfield, and Mary Lineberger of Argentina, to Spanish work, Chicago.

Minnesota-Wisconsin Fellowship: Barbara Vann of Gadsden, Ala., to student work, Milwaukee; and Kay Hilder of Central City, Neb., to do deaf work, Minneapolis.

North Carolina: Paula Williamson of Clinton, N.C., to youth work, Boone, and Theda Ross of Buena Vista, Tenn., to work with the military, Fayetteville.

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Florida: Alan and Dee Thompson of Richmond, Va., to do youth evangelism, Bradenton; and Mary Lynn Tollison of Laurens, S.C., to Christian social ministries work, Fort Myers.

Northwest: Daryl and Tomma Edmonds of Manhattan, Kan., to work evangelism.

Pennsylvania-South Jersey: Marshall and Elaine Chambers of Maywood, Mo., evangelism.

South Dakota: Mark Bryant of Athens, Tenn., to student work and church extension in Spearfish.

Colorado: Jeff Buscher of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to Christian high adventure work, Montrose.

Michigan: Laura McFarland of Desloge, Mo., to Spanish work, Lansing.

Texas: Nora Parker of Jefferson City, Tenn., to resort missions, Corpus Christi.

Oklahoma: Maxine Locklear of Pembroke, N.C., to language missions, Weatherford.

Georgia: Cynthia Parks of Coravallis, Ore., to Christian social ministries, Marietta.

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Sue Wesberry, Ministers'  
Wives Founder, Dies

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ATLANTA (BP)—Mrs. Sue Latimer Wesberry, first president and a primary organizer of the Southern Baptist Ministers' Wives Conference, died Sept. 7 after a long illness.

She was the wife of James P. Wesberry, pastor emeritus of Morningside Baptist Church, Atlanta, now executive director of the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States.

Mrs. Wesberry, a member of the board of directors for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, was active in all phases of denominational life. For many years she was an elementary school librarian and was active in Delta Kappa Gamma for teachers.

Her husband is a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Survivors include her husband; one son, James Wesberry Jr., of Washington, D. C.; a sister, Mrs. Loulie Latimer Owens of Greenville, S. C., author of the column, "Minnie Belle" in Baptist Program magazine; one niece and six grandchildren.

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Memphis Names Frank Groner  
Outstanding Senior Citizen

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)—Thirty-six years to the day that Frank S. Groner traveled to the Peabody Hotel to interview for the top position at a floundering Memphis hospital, he was hailed in the very same hotel as the community's outstanding senior citizen of the year.

A number of Memphis and Tennessee leaders spoke at the Kiwanis Club ceremony honoring the "humble, hard-working, velvet-fisted" Groner, who as president from 1946 to 1980 turned the 500-bed Baptist Memorial into the largest hospital in the United States (2,068 beds today).

The Kiwanis Club annually presents the outstanding senior citizen award to a Memphian 70 years or older who has exhibited a progressive leadership in the community, one who is the recipient of other significant awards and who has led an exemplary life, said Art Waymire, head of Blue Cross in Memphis and program moderator for the luncheon.

Groner received a plaque and the Kiwanis Club gave a \$350 donation in his name to the Metropolitan Interfaith Association for its program of providing meals to the elderly.

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