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October 7, 1982

82-142

Denominational Leaders Meet To 'Define' Problems

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)—Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. and eight other leaders met Oct. 5 to discuss ways to help the 13.8 million member denomination "get past the controversy we have been in."

While declining to discuss the specific details of the meeting, Draper told Baptist Press the participants "discussed inerrancy, theology, the program, the schools, education ... the whole thing. It was an honest discussion of what we felt the controversy was about, why we were having problems, why we were having tensions. We talked about the Southern Baptist Convention as each of us saw it."

Meeting with Draper at the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport complex were: William Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Shreveport, La.; Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies; Adrian Rogers, past president of the SBC and pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn.; Fred Wolfe, president of the SBC Pastors Conference and pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala.; Roy Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Also participating were John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church of Shreveport, and first vice president of the SBC, and Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City and second vice president of the SBC.

Declining to participate was Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church of Houston, and a leader of the moderate-conservative faction of the denomination. "He (Draper) invited me and I had intended to go. I decided for personal reasons not to participate," Chafin said, but did not amplify.

Draper said: "We had a good meeting. It was honest and candid. Everybody made strong statements. There was a willingness on the part of everybody to discuss what we had been doing." He noted he had invited a small group because he "knew the smaller the group the more progress we could make."

He added the group agreed "there are points beyond which we cannot go" (but) said there is still room for negotiation.

Dilday said he was "pleased with any effort like this to get groups of people in our convention together. I feel it is always helpful in a time of disagreement and tension to sit down across the table and share in an open way."

He specified he participated not as an official representative of the seminary but as an "individual."

Patterson, identified as a leader of a movement to turn the denomination to a more conservative stance, said the meeting was amicable, frank and honest. "Nobody became combative ... that was a very definite plus, demonstrating widely disparate views can come together and talk."

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Rogers said it was "productive and helped us to clear our minds as to how the various ones in the room perceived the problem. I believe before we can solve the difficulties, we have got to have a clear understanding of what they are. I felt it was a worthwhile meeting."

Draper and Patterson were hesitant to label the meeting "productive," both noting it is "too soon to tell." But Patterson commented: "I feel it is productive when folks who disagree are sitting down talking."

Draper said he is planning another meeting, but with an expanded participation. "We will probably triple the number of participants," he said, noting no date has been set for such a meeting, but indicating it may be in late October or early November.

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Senegal's Only Baptist Woman
Dies, Leaving Void In Outreach

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press
10/7/82

DAKAR, Senegal (BP)—When Marie Diatta died several young men lost their only example of a Senegalese Christian wife and mother.

Diatta, wife of house church leader Sekou Diatta and mother of a three-year-old daughter, was the only native-born Baptist woman in Senegal. The cause of her death Sept. 25 was not given but furloughing missionaries from Senegal believe it may have resulted from a problem pregnancy.

With a population that is 91 percent Moslem, Senegal has yielded few Christian converts since Southern Baptists began work in the west African nation in 1969. Some are unwilling to make their decision public—the price for becoming a Christian in Senegal may be loss of family, friends and job.

But recently several young men have become Christians and begun meeting in two house churches including the one led by Diatta. The Diattas had also opened their home to these young men. In their search for Christian wives they had been encouraged by knowing one.

Most of them were reached through the ministry of Baptist centers which offer English classes and recreation, an indirect approach that works where direct evangelism fails. A new government accord has opened the way for more of these centers.

Diatta was the only woman Southern Baptists had baptized and one of only a handful of evangelical Christian women in the country, said Sally Cawthon, Southern Baptist missionary now on furlough in Grand Terrace, Calif. Protestant Christians claim less than 0.1 percent of the Senegalese population.

A Christian family is a powerful witness in Senegal just because they are so rare, said Cawthon. In a Moslem society a family in which the woman is a respected member with rights of her own is also rare, she added.

The Moslem seclusion of women has made reaching them very difficult. All Moslem women live in the homes of their husbands or fathers who make all decisions for them. It never occurs to Senegalese women to be concerned about their own religious experience, she said.

This seclusion also creates a language barrier for Southern Baptist missionaries who have studied French. Although their husbands may speak French most women speak only Wolof or another local language. Diatta was an exception. She had learned French and had almost completed her high school education. Missionaries are now studying Wolof in order to reach more Senegalese.

Senegal has been one of Southern Baptists' least responsive mission fields but the two experienced missionary couples assigned there are beginning to see changes. Cawthon and her husband, Frank, spent last year alone in Senegal while their colleagues, Ken and Margaret Robertson of Arkansas, were on furlough. During that year several young men made professions of faith.

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When the Cawthons left for furlough there were three Baptist congregations in Senegal and the missionaries felt they had developed an approach that could reach Senegal's Moslems.

The approach is keyed to Baptist centers in the cities and to agricultural and other developmental aid in the countryside. Eager to provide a better lifestyle for their people government leaders recently signed an accord naming the Baptist mission an official development agency giving permission to build Baptist centers and start projects such as agricultural stations and well-drilling and granting tax-free privileges for their work.

Because taxes may equal up to 120 percent of a product's value in Senegal Cawthon said the accord will effectively double the mission's budget.

The officials gave these privileges with full knowledge that Baptists are teaching the Bible and evangelizing in the centers, said Cawthon.

"The center approach has proved effective for reaching Moslems where direct evangelism has failed," he said. While Moslems would not go to a church many are eager to take reading classes and participate in recreation at the centers. As reading classes progress they begin studying the Bible and discussing its teachings. The young men who became Christians were reached through these classes.

Cawthon said his major reservation in signing the government accord was over whether Baptists could provide the personnel needed for the projects they were promising. News that four new missionary couples had been appointed and Baptists in other countries were interested in sending missionaries calmed his fears.

The Cawthons are cutting their year-long furlough short to return to Senegal in January to continue their work and free the Robertsons to move back to Bignona where they worked during their last term.

"We need to really hit Senegal hard, as hard as we can," said Cawthon, "so we can get a nucleus of believers who can support one another through the problems they have in their country."

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Youth Leaders Admonished
To Model Trust Environment

By Gail Rothwell

Baptist Press
10/7/82

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Inspiring trust should be a priority for youth ministers a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor says.

Dan Aleshire, assistant professor of religious education, told a group of youth ministers attending a Sunday School Board seminar that youth are more open to trusting in Jesus Christ if they have been exposed to an "environment of trust."

"If youth ministers and leaders are trustworthy they will have modeled that environment of basic faith when they tell youth they need to trust in Jesus Christ," he said.

Aleshire explained trust is a relationship word and a person cannot trust in something abstract. "The first thing youth ministers should be concerned with is nurturing youth in their ability to trust Jesus Christ," he said. "Faith starts in relationships and is lived out in our thinking, feeling and doing."

The task of helping youth realize their faith relationship will grow as they mature should also be part of the youth minister's responsibility.

Aleshire noted youth can believe in Jesus as Lord without understanding all the "believe thats" associated with the Christian faith. "For instance, children can believe in God and that he loves them without a complete understanding of the virgin birth," he said.

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"It is important as youth grow and mature that leaders help them refine their thinking. Help them come to know the Lord but also help them realize they don't know everything there is to know about God. Their relationship with him will expand and change as they grow."

Aleshire said the church is the place where the family and the youth should be able to develop realistic expectations of what family life is all about.

"Common to all families with youth is the conflict caused by teen-agers separating themselves from close family bonds. For 13 years the child has gone to the parents for advice and now he turns to his peers. This change is painful for parents," Aleshire stressed.

"The church can teach families how to deal with conflict instead of ignoring it. The relationship between parent and child must be one of give and take," he said.

Youth ministers were told they need to help parents learn to give increasing degrees of freedom to youth while maintaining some controls.

Aleshire said the Bible emphasizes children should listen to their parents. "Therefore, parents are to teach and discuss with their children," Aleshire said.

Parents need to set parenting goals that are true to the gospel, Aleshire said. "These goals include the value of right living, the need for God's presence in their lives, service, caring and, above all, love and trust."

During the week-long youth seminar participants discussed and reviewed youth discipleship materials available from the Sunday School Board's church training department and the Home Mission Board's evangelism section. The seminar was co-sponsored by the board's church training and church administration departments.

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Blind Preacher Not Deaf
To God's Call To Ministry

By Elizabeth Young

Baptist Press
10/7/82

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)—To John McConnell being blind isn't necessarily a handicap. He considers it more an inconvenience that has some advantages.

"I don't know if the people are asleep when I'm preaching," he laughed.

The 1981 graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary is comfortable enough with his blindness to joke about it from the pulpit. "No, this is not a Phoenix telephone directory," he tells the congregation as he opens one volume of his Braille Bible. To bring his entire Bible to church he'd need a wheelbarrow, he explains.

Being blind also seems to be an advantage in counseling, McConnell said. Without the distraction of a person's appearance he is able to really listen to what is said. This advantage carries over into other relationships. "I'm used as a sounding board a lot of times," he said.

While touring Grand Canyon College, Phoenix, Ariz., as a prospective student in 1972, his pastor told him he should be a preacher. Instead of using his blindness as an excuse to reject the call he felt from God McConnell borrowed Moses' excuse. "I don't speak very well," he said.

He took almost a year to be sure of God's call and then enrolled at Grand Canyon College to prepare for the ministry. "I haven't regretted it since," he said. He completed his bachelor of arts degree with a major in theology in three and a half years and was named in "Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities."

Three and a half years later he received the master of divinity degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and was named an "Outstanding Young Man of America."

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He took one year off from his studies to work for a Christian publishing house for the blind. The company wanted to train him for a job after he finished siminary but he preferred to stay in the preaching ministry.

The time off from school also gave him a chance to recover from the trying times of the previous year when he was mismatched with a hyperactive guide dog. Neither McConnell nor the dog fared well in the relationship and after a year he returned him to the training school.

The 29-year-old became blind in the oxygen-rich atmosphere of an incubator following his premature birth. His twin did not survive and doctors did not expect McConnell to live either.

Today without a guide dog he is self-sufficient. He lives alone and uses public transportation or walks where he needs to go.

While in seminary he was associate pastor of Rollingwood Baptist Church in San Pablo, Calif., and worked with blind members of the church in the church's independent living center.

But he doesn't want his blindness to limit the scope of his ministry. Although he is willing to work with the blind or handicapped he believes he should work with them in the context of the total church. Unless a person is severely handicapped he "should be blended in with everyone else," he stressed.

McConnell looks forward to the day when, as a church staff member, he will be able to fulfill his call to the ministry but he hasn't waited for a church staff position to begin to minister.

For three months last winter he preached for a pastorless church in Mesa, Ariz., and last month he led the nondenominational worship service at his housing complex. When asking about the "ground rules" for the nondenominational service he was told to just preach the Bible. "Well, that's okay," he replied, "I do it anyway."

He is also an active witness on a personal basis. One of the many he's led to Christ is his girlfriend, Carol King, who is also blind. Later he had the privilege of baptizing her at North Phoenix Baptist Church.

Both are now active members of North Phoenix where they sing in the choir and he teaches in a fifth grade Sunday School department. They plan to be married next July.

Not satisfied to stop learning now that he's out of school, McConnell joined Toastmasters International to become an even better public speaker. He is learning to maintain eye contact with the audience and is learning to use more gestures although this is difficult since he uses one hand to read his Braille notes.

Fighting hard against the stereotyping of blind people McConnell refuses to be relegated to a role where his talent is not tapped.

Although he receives Supplemental Security Income from the state, he recently needed additional money because there were no preaching opportunities. He went to work for a company which hires blind people for such jobs as counting straws and toothpicks and assembling mops. Starting pay was \$1.68 per hour and after five months McConnell worked his way up the pay scale to minimum wage.

Last month he decided he'd "had it with the routine, monotonous situation" and resigned. "People have the idea if you're blind you're either deaf or crippled or ignorant as well," McConnell said. He explained churches sometimes think their buildings need ramps or rails for him to be able to preach.

"I'm only blind," McConnell emphasized. "I can stand up and preach just as well as anyone else."