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Black Baptist Leader
Changes View Of Reagan

By Stan Hasty

WASHINGTON (BP)—A prominent black Baptist leader who supports Democratic presidential contender Walter F. Mondale emerged from an Oval Office meeting with President Reagan Sept. 10 having concluded Reagan's views on religion and blacks have been distorted.

T. J. Jemison, president of the seven-million-member National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., told reporters after the half-hour meeting, "Once you see a man personally and talk with him personally...you have (a) different point of view."

Jemison, accompanied by five other officers of the nation's largest black organization of any kind, appeared reluctant to speak to dozens of reporters outside the White House and was repeatedly coached during the three-minute exchange by one of his convention's vice-presidents, E. V. Hill of Los Angeles, an outspoken Reagan supporter.

Reagan called Jemison during the recent annual meeting of the National Baptist Convention in Washington to invite him to the White House after the black leader said during his presidential address, "I don't believe the present administration feels the heartbeat, the desires, the concerns of black people." He added, "I don't believe our nation under the present leadership will move us into the mainstream of American life."

Such rhetoric is new to the National Baptist Convention, which only last year elected Jemison to replace Joseph H. Jackson, for 30 years president of the body. Jackson consistently endorsed Republican presidential candidates and advocated a go-slow approach to civil rights.

Frustration with Jackson's leadership resulted in a 1961 split in the organization, a pullout led by young civil rights activists, including the late Martin Luther King Jr. The new group was named Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. Some black congregations are affiliated with both bodies.

Reagan's call to Jemison reportedly was occasioned also by the National Baptist Convention's invitation to Mondale to address it. In that Sept. 6 appearance, the former vice-president received a rousing introduction by once presidential rival Jesse Jackson. Mondale then made one of his most effective speeches of the young campaign during which many of the 15,000 delegates shouted and otherwise demonstrated their approval as the Minnesotan issued a stinging indictment of Reagan's economic and civil rights records.

But after his face-to-face White House meeting with Reagan, Jemison conceded that "perhaps" the president's treatment of blacks has been "distorted." Whereas before the meeting he felt Reagan was unsympathetic to blacks, Jemison added, "I (now) feel that he does have sympathy for blacks."

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Tennessee Churches Fight
'Political' Designation

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JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)—Thirteen churches, including nine Southern Baptist congregations, are fighting the state attorney general over their opposition to a liquor-by-the-drink referendum in this west Tennessee town.

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The churches filed a class action suit Sept. 10 seeking to overturn an opinion by Tennessee Attorney General Michael Cody which classified the churches as "political action committees."

Cody issued an opinion Aug. 29 that churches which contributed \$200 to Citizens Against Drug Abuse or spent that much on their own would be political action committees and must file financial disclosure forms, listing receipts and expenditures related to the referendum.

The deadline for filing these forms would be 48 days after the election (Sept. 17).

At a Sept. 10 meeting, 21 pastors and laymen from the 13 churches agreed to seek a declaratory judgement the statute is a "serious violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which guarantees religious liberty and the separation of church and state."

The churches will seek a temporary injunction from filing the financial disclosure statements until a hearing on the case can be held or until the Tennessee General Assembly meets in January.

Several legislators have indicated churches were not intended to be included under the law and the matter will be brought up in the 1985 General Assembly.

A hearing on the temporary injunction request is expected to be held Sept. 17.

The question of churches being political action committees came when David A. Collins, state coordinator of elections, received an anonymous letter with a copy of an advertisement West Jackson Baptist Church had placed in the July 15 edition of the Jackson Sun.

Collins informed Jerry Woodall, district attorney in Jackson, it appeared the church had violated the Campaign Disclosure Act by not designating a treasurer in the ad and by not filing a campaign disclosure statement.

Woodall requested an opinion from Cody to the question, "Does a church which donated money to a group organized to defeat a local liquor referendum have to file any financial disclosure reports with the State Election Commission?"

"We realize that such groups do not ordinarily consider themselves to be 'political campaign committees' and in some cases have not thought that they were obligated to file campaign financial disclosure statements," Cody said.

Describing the statute as "clear and all-inclusive," Cody added, "The General Assembly may not have intended this result. However, the law appears clear, and any changes in the law would have to be enacted by the General Assembly."

John Lee Taylor, pastor of West Jackson Baptist Church and spokesman for the group, issued the following statement: "Since we believe the attorney general's opinion to be a serious violation of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution which guarantees religious liberty and the separation of church and state by declaring 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;...'

"And since we believe the attorney general's opinion will have detrimental effect on all the churches of the state of Tennessee speaking out on moral and ethical issues, the churches have voted unanimously to instruct our attorneys to file a class action case for a declaratory judgement and a temporary injunction in Chancey Court of Madison County today.

"We believe it was not the intent of the General Assembly for churches to be included under this statute. We are taking this action to clarify that intent and to maintain our position on separation of church and state."

At a meeting in Jackson Sept. 6, Tom Madden, executive secretary of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, told the church representatives this issue has an impact on more than just Madison County. "I believe that Baptists and other concerned Christians would want this challenged," Madden added.

1984 New Orleans World's Fair:
A Different Kind Of Ministry

By Leisa A. Farnmett

NEW ORLEANS (BP)—The New Orleans night air was warm and swarming with insects as Jimmy Kinnaird, with his trumpet tucked under his arm, diligently tried to explain to two inquisitive Englishmen how they could become Christians.

The young Englishmen, just two of the estimated seven million visitors to New Orleans' 1984 World's Fair, had stopped to hear an evening performance of Kinnaird's brass/jazz band. But they found Kinnaird and the other 15 semester and summer missionaries who comprised the Baptist Exposition Ministries band and street witnessing team offered more to French Quarter visitors than music.

Performing in the French Quarter has afforded Kinnaird and his team members multiple opportunities to witness. Kinnaird, a native of Eastland, Texas, felt the young men will eventually become Christians.

Three times daily, the band, balloon artist Barry Mitchell of Sweetwater, Tenn., and mime Laura Lea Barksdale of Columbus, Ga., entertain French Quarter browsers. The remainder of the team—summer missionaries who returned to college in mid-August—talked with and distributed tracts to the gathered audiences.

The team began work in June, approximately one month after the fair's opening, and will continue until the fair closes Nov. 11.

Baptist Exposition Ministries Director Jimmie Knox described Southern Baptist efforts in the sea port town as a "different kind of ministry."

Instead of operating an official Southern Baptist pavilion on the 84-acre site like at the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tenn., Southern Baptists' witness at the water-themed fair is concentrated on visitors to the city's historic French Quarter and area campgrounds.

Knox, who formerly was pastor of First Baptist Church, Norco (a New Orleans suburb) and directed the New Orleans Carver Baptist Center, originally anticipated 900 Southern Baptist volunteers (10 per performance) to assist the missionaries in street witnessing. However, by summer's end and the first half of the fair, only about 300 volunteers had enlisted.

When fall classes began, a few local volunteers assumed the summer missionaries' responsibilities, passing out tracts and talking to people when the band performed. Although dramatically fewer tourists have visited New Orleans since the school season began, US-2 missionary and Baptist Exposition Ministries associate director Judy Stewart said volunteers are crucial to continued French Quarter ministries.

"We're not getting to talk to as many people as we'd like," she explained. "We really need volunteers to street witness during the evening performances."

Knox said, "We've had a difficult time because (street witnessing) is not traditional, and volunteer response to the street witnessing demand has not materialized. "(Southern Baptists) have grown so accustomed to counting the results," Knox added. "(Here) we'll never know whether we accomplish something or not."

Commented Stewart, "Some days (the band) does eight to ten sets of music and no one comes to know the Lord. They are content on those days to know they have sown some seeds."

Barksdale, the only mime in the Quarter, said street witnessing was "a thankless job." Yet, she added, "This is the seed planting business. We are in contact with more people in a day than the average person is in a year."

Knox also explained some potential volunteers are inhibited by a misconception the French Quarter is unsafe.

But Stewart and husband and co-associate Dave said there is maximum security in the Quarter in order to insure the city's thriving tourist industry.

In addition to daily street ministries the Baptist Exposition Ministries summer and semester missionaries also provided orientation to the approximately 20 Southern Baptist churches participating in ministries to 17 surrounding Louisiana and Mississippi campgrounds. This is the first time one-half of the campgrounds have had mission groups, said project coordinator and US-2 missionary Caroline Veno.

During the summer the church groups, primarily from Texas but also from Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma, led Bible studies and provided puppet shows and family-type entertainment. Many campers have responded with surprise Baptists did this, Veno said.

She hopes to build a continuing ministry with the campgrounds, citing the need to minister to the year-round employees there who often do not have any relationship with a church.

Currently, some local churches are taking turns providing Sunday morning worship services at a local state park. Yet, she noted, "It's hard to get local churches involved.

"The main problem is they don't realize the need," Veno explained and added many churches think members must be thoroughly trained and it is more "glamorous" to minister out of state than in their own community.

Southern Baptists also are lending some support in the on-site, interdenominational "Thirst" pavilion.

David G. Peach, former director of the Baptist Ministries pavilion at the 1982 Knoxville World's Fair, directs the New Orleans pavilion, a cooperative effort of 22 denominations. Thirst, located in the fair's convention center, The Great Hall, offers a multi-media show which presents Christ as the eternal solution to thirst. Free literature about the participating denominations, a Bible computer game and the antique Bible display case seen at the 1982 Baptist Pavilion are displayed in the pavilion's lobby.

The pavilion, a ministry of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, also provides on-site Sunday morning worship services and chaplaincy services to fair visitors. Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, motivational speaker Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif., and Sister Theresa, Nobel prize winning Catholic nun who directs a ministry to the poor in Calcutta, India, are among those contracted to lead worship services for fairgoers.

Of the 157 participating congregations supplying pavilion volunteers, 16 are Baptist churches with a total of 65 volunteers.

Caroline Peach, volunteers director and wife of pavilion director commented, "The Thirst Pavilion witnesses to fairgoers that denominations can work together."

David Mason, a Southern Baptist who directs the pavilion's sponsoring organization, Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches, said he was not surprised by the interdenominational cooperation since the Federation had witnessed cooperative effort among various religious denominations for many years.

The Thirst pavilion has allowed people from various Christian faiths to "get acquainted and find out other faiths are not so bad after all," Peach said.

At the 1984 World's Fair Southern Baptists have the advantage of a twin-pronged approach: working cooperatively with other denominations in presenting a Christian witness to fair visitors and witnessing outside the fair gates to those who Knox calls "a different type of people" needing a different type of ministry.

Attendance Records Set
At Conference Centers

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—All-time attendance records were set at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Centers in 1984, with 61,441 persons attending summer sessions.

The 1984 total represents an increase of 3,974 or seven percent more than the 1983 attendance of 57,467.

At Ridgecrest, attendance was 32,832, increase of 8.6 percent; Glorieta's total of 28,609 was a gain of five percent.

Robert Turner, director of the conference center division of the Baptist Sunday School Board, attributed the increase to a change in schedule which allowed the addition of one Sunday school leadership conference, one church music leadership conference and two Centrifuge youth camps at each center.

A total of 13,664 persons attended eight Sunday school leadership conferences, an increase of 1,409 or 11.4 percent. Four church music leadership conferences attracted 7,496 persons, an increase of 2,143 or 40 percent. Centrifuge youth camps at the conference centers registered 11,473, a gain of 2,446 or 27 percent.

"I am pleased with this year's results in the first year of the new schedule," said Turner. The new schedule will be implemented again in 1985.

"The conferees seemed to like the early departure feature of the new schedule (conferences ended with a night session and persons were asked to vacate their rooms by 8 a.m.)," said Turner. "This seemed to enable more to attend every session of the conferences."



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