



BAPTIST PRESS

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86-156

Confessions Help Bridge
Black-White Tensions

By Ed Moses Jr.

WITLAGIE, Bophuthatswana (BP)—Neither the risk of severe punishment nor the thought of cold nights without firewood kept Christians in Witlagte, Bophuthatswana, from responding to a biblical command to confess their sins.

As a result, some of the black-white tensions in the independent homeland set up by South Africa have eased, and a 43-year-old church has gained new life and a rekindled witness.

Until recently, Sunday school at the church was "for children only," but after Southern Baptist missionary Lolete Dotson of Alabama led a teacher training conference, an adult class was started.

As Pastor Moruti Mahlongu taught from mimeographed literature, he read to the 15 adults crowded into his small living room, "God's people are without faithfulness. There is stealing by God's children, and his blessings cannot be given to them."

The passage from Hosea 4 touched one woman. She interrupted to confess openly a sin—stealing firewood from nearby white farmers. After her outburst of honesty, others admitted the scarcity of firewood also led them to steal. Some of the men had stolen gasoline and tools from their bosses.

The adult class then realized why there was so little growth in the church: God could not shower his people with blessings when most of them were living in rebellion and stealing.

Painfully and hesitantly the thieves wrote letters to the white farmers, some of whom were hardened Afrikaners with inflamed racial feelings. Knowing severe punishment could result from the confessions, Mahlongu delivered the letters to the various farm owners in person.

At a farm reputed to be the home of a couple with the most intense racial hatred, the wife stunned the pastor by exclaiming, "Well, this is real Christianity in action—Christians bold enough to confess stealing our firewood! That has to be the Holy Spirit at work!"

She told Mahlongu she had become a Christian herself just six weeks before. She offered to employ one of the church members who had confessed and sent a large bag of oranges as a gift to the confessors.

The actions were soon the talk of the village. Some argued it was OK to steal from white men but not from blacks. Others expressed deep approval and admiration for the bold action of the church members.

Then, on a bitterly cold night, Mahlongu called the entire church together for a confession service. There would be no singing until the services ended, he told them. Personal grievances and other sins needed to be confessed.

After a slow start, person after person spoke out. Many trembled visibly as they were deeply convicted. Some of the men cried—a rarity in African culture. Many long-standing wounds within the membership were healed after lengthy prayer sessions.

The meeting, in an unheated building, lasted from 6 p.m. until 3:30 a.m.

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In the days that followed, villagers questioned the church members, seeking the source of the courage and openness that had become obvious. "How can we change like the Baptists?" they wanted to know.

God is blessing the congregation now, Mahlongu reports, all because of an adult Bible class where the Word of God brought conviction and transformation.

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Ed Moses Jr. is a Southern Baptist missionary in Bophuthatswana.

St. Louis Housing
Booked On 1st Day

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
10/22/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptists only needed one day to fill their convention's allotment of downtown hotel rooms for the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis June 16-18.

The St. Louis Housing Bureau received about 4,500 requests postmarked Oct. 1 from Southern Baptists seeking accommodations in the 4,000-room downtown block, announced Tim A. Hedquist, convention manager and vice president for business and finance of the SBC Executive Committee.

Oct. 1 was the earliest postmark allowed on 1987 convention housing requests, Hedquist said. The requests were opened and assigned Oct. 15 by employees of the city's housing bureau, unaffiliated with any SBC agency or group.

The first-day demand for rooms was a record, Hedquist reported: "In previous years, we've been getting about 4,000 room requests postmarked Oct. 1, about 800 or 900 postmarked Oct. 2 and several hundred that were mailed later. This year, about 4,500 were postmarked Oct. 1, and 50 were postmarked Oct. 2. Hardly any were sent later."

Consequently, the 4,000 pre-arranged rooms—normally enough to accommodate all the Oct. 1 mailers—fell short this time. The block will be expanded to about 4,500 for San Antonio, Texas, and the 1988 annual meeting, he said.

Lucky winners in the St. Louis Housing Derby will receive confirmation on their downtown rooms after Dec. 1. First they will receive acknowledgement from the housing bureau, and then they will hear from the hotels. Room deposits will be made directly to the hotels.

But all is not lost for other Southern Baptists who want to attend the convention. About 9,000 additional rooms are available in St. Louis, although they are not as close to the downtown Cervantes Convention Center as rooms in the convention block.

The 500 requests postmarked Oct. 1 that were not assigned rooms in the block and the others postmarked from Oct. 2 to Oct. 6 are being turned over to travel agents, Hedquist said. The travel agents will secure accommodations for these requests and then contact the requestors directly.

The early requestors are less fortunate, he noted. People who mailed their requests prior to Oct. 1 will receive their original requests forms, along with their ill-fated pre-Oct. 1 postmarks. They each also will receive a list of available St. Louis hotels and telephone numbers.

That information also is available to Southern Baptists who wish to attend the annual meeting but who have not yet made housing accommodations, Hedquist noted. Interested persons can contact the SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce, Suite 750, Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

But Hedquist suggested two other options for arranging for rooms during the convention:

One, contact a travel agent. Travel agents work on commission and at no cost to the consumer. A travel agent can help track down available rooms and save consumers time, effort and telephone bills.

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Or, call the toll-free reservation numbers for hotel chains with facilities in St. Louis. This is a direct, inexpensive and relatively easy way to guarantee a room.

Accommodations also are available for Southern Baptists who plan to bring their housing with them, Hedquist said. St. Louis has a downtown recreational vehicle park. Reservations should be made directly with St. Louis RV Park, P.O. Box 663, St. Louis, Mo. 63106; phone (314) 241-3330. Other recreational vehicle parks are available, but not near downtown, he said.

Limited accommodations also are available to Southern Baptists who cannot afford hotel rooms, he added. The St. Louis local arrangements committee plans to provide some free housing in homes of Southern Baptists in the community. Information about this housing is available from the Executive Committee.

Does the record rate of early requests for hotel rooms provide an indication of the size of next year's annual meeting? "Absolutely not," Hedquist said. "To this point, there has been no correlation between room reservations this early and attendance at the convention."

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Appalachian Poverty
Challenges Churches

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press
10/22/86

CHARLESTON, W. Va. (BP)—Churches in Appalachia must lead the way in responding to the region's worst economic crisis in 20 years, a new study has concluded.

W. David Lockard, a Southern Baptist representative on the Commission on Religion in Appalachia that sponsored the study, urged Baptist churches to "help gear up for committed, consistent and long-term efforts" to fight poverty and to minister to its victims.

"When the church has been indifferent and has failed to act, it has become part of the problem rather than contributing to the solution," said Lockard, director of organization for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Ivar Holmquist, a Lutheran minister who headed the task force that conducted the study, described the crisis as "very real."

"There is hunger everywhere you go," he said. "There are people so far down the economic ladder that their self-esteem is destroyed. People are being pushed to the very margins."

The task force spent 16 months tracking the economic conditions of Appalachia, which is home to more than 19 million people in parts of 13 states, stretching from New York to Mississippi.

Among signs of the crisis cited in the report are:

— Massive job losses as steel factories, textile mills and coal mines shut down. From 1982 to 1983, more than 350,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. Although 60 percent of the laid-off workers found jobs, three-quarters of them were in low-paying service industries.

-- Widespread unemployment. In 1985, unemployment rates in 21 percent of Appalachian counties were more than double the national average, while another 61 percent of the counties had higher than normal rates.

Holmquist added 123,000 residents of eastern Ohio, West Virginia and western Pennsylvania have been unemployed so long they no longer are counted in the statistics.

The study placed part of the blame on multinational corporations that have moved manufacturing and mining operations out of the region to take advantage of cheap labor overseas. Another factor, it said, is technological improvements enabling smaller workforces.

"What we have in Appalachia are the makings of an underclass that is mostly white," said Holmquist. "The middle class is disappearing."

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"The choices being forced on many people are those usually associated with Third World poverty," added Lockard. "Do you buy food for the family or gasoline for the car so you can look for a job? Do you spend your last dollars on medicine or a coat for one of the children?"

"It's a constant struggle for survival."

The report offered broad proposals for churches to help improve Appalachia's economic outlook. Suggestions ranged from sponsoring job training programs to lobbying federal, state and local governments for changes in public policies which affect the poor.

The Commission on Religion in Appalachia, founded in 1964, is comprised of 18 denominations and 10 state councils of churches.

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Supreme Court Rejects
Church Property Dispute

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
10/22/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—The Supreme Court has refused to review a church property dispute involving a Pennsylvania congregation and a European-based religious society.

Attorneys for St. Cyprian's Chapel in Eddystone, Pa., unsuccessfully attempted to convince the high court to review the case with their argument that civil courts, when resolving church property disputes, must confine their inquiry to a secular interpretation of legal documents rather than inquiring into the activities of the congregation.

A group of Roman Catholic laity in Philadelphia, and Wilmington, Del., formed a congregation in the early 1970s for the purpose of retaining the Latin mass that had been abandoned by the Catholic Church. The congregation, which eventually took the name St. Cyprian's Chapel, later incorporated as a independent not-for-profit corporation in Delaware.

An association of Catholic priests based in Switzerland also formed in 1970 to preserve the traditional Catholic liturgy. That group, the Fraternity of the Apostles of Jesus and Mary, also was known as the Sacerdotal Society of Saint Pius X, or simply the "Society."

In 1975, a new governing bishop withdrew the decree that had permitted the Society's formation. The group's members continued to associate with each other and to call the voluntary association by the Society's name.

Members of St. Cyprian's Chapel, who met for worship in rented halls, invited various priests, including some affiliated with the Society, to lead their services. Priests from the Society also assisted the church with its incorporation, although the articles of incorporation included no reference to the Society or its priests. The church's original bylaws did provide for its board of directors to include several officers of the Society as ex officio members.

In 1981, the congregation signed a contract on a church building. The deed for the building was in the name of St. Cyprian's, and the mortgage was guaranteed by individual congregants.

Several years later, a dispute erupted between U.S. priests associated with the Society, including several directors of St. Cyprian's, and European priests, including an archbishop who purported to remove the U.S. priests from their positions in the Society. Following that action, St. Cyprian's amended its bylaws to delete all references to the Society and to provide the church's directors with the power to select their own successors.

In October 1983, the Society sent a letter to one of St. Cyprian's directors asserting the Society's ownership of the church building and instructing the congregation not to allow certain priests to say mass. The congregation, board of directors and priests rejected the Society's claim to ownership and brought action against the Society in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. The Society counterclaimed for possession.

District Judge Joseph L. McGlynn Jr., after a September 1985 trial, ruled that St. Cyprian's held the church building in trust for the Society and ordered the church to deed the building to the Society and to account to the group for other property.

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Although McGlynn held that the title "established St. Cyprian's as an independent entity beyond the control of the Society," he concluded—based on an examination of the conduct of and relationship between and among the laity and clergy—that the church should not have been established as an individual entity. He cited such actions as the church's using the Society's name in advertising for new members, linking the Society with the church in the congregation's newsletter and making references to the Society in fund-raising efforts.

The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court ruling without opinion. (86-414, St. Cyprian's Chapel v. Fraternity of Apostles)

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Community Church In
California Votes SBC

By Cameron Crabtree

Baptist Press
10/22/86

GLENDALE, Calif. (BP)—The independent United Community Church of Glendale, Calif., has voted unanimously to affiliate with the Southern Baptist General Convention of California.

The \$7 million church facility, which sits on property larger than a city block, is comprised of a 2,200-seat amphitheater, chapel, garden fellowship building, educational and office facilities and a full gymnasium.

With 800 members, the church automatically became one of the larger churches in the California convention. According to the convention's 1985 annual, average church membership in the convention is 292.

The "transdenominational" church made the decision in order to "maximize its efficiency for Christ" and become an integral part of the "great commission," said Pastor John Myrick.

"We didn't want to be an island unto ourselves," Myrick said. "We felt we could accomplish more for Christ in cooperation with other churches." The church also needed the resources of a mainline denomination to help with training and involvement of teachers and members, he added.

"We want to be part of the Cooperative Program," Myrick pointed out, referring to the church's desire to become part of a concerted effort to spread the gospel. The Cooperative Program is the Southern Baptist program of funding worldwide mission, education and evangelistic endeavors.

"Since they are of 'like faith and order,' I am pleased to welcome them into the convention," said C.B. Hogue, state convention executive director. Hogue said he discovered the only difference between the church and most others in the state convention were its name and independence. The doctrines, polity, constitution and bylaws are typical of Southern Baptist churches, he added.

Two other people instrumental in helping the church decide to affiliate with the convention were Jess Moody, pastor, and Jim Rives, executive associate pastor, of First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, Calif. Myrick described Moody as "probably the number one factor outside the church," in persuading the church to consider convention affiliation. Myrick is a former staff member of the Van Nuys church.

All three helped the church's deacons and trustees understand the "local church/state convention relationship and the financial impact of affiliation of the church," Myrick said. According to the church's annual report, it operates on a budget of almost \$400,000.

"Our goal in coming here was to reach this community for Christ, to make this an evangelistic church," Myrick said. "We want to be a church where we give God a chance to do miracles."

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