



BAPTIST PRESS

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April 6, 1987

87-51

N-BJC

BJCPA Files Testimony
Opposing New IRS Rules

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)—The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has joined federal lawmakers in opposing newly proposed regulations that would affect the lobbying rights of non-profit organizations.

The Treasury Department proposed the set of rules as an interpretation of the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which was enacted by Congress to clarify allowable legislative activities of charitable organizations. Central to the proposed regulations are definitions of various forms of lobbying.

In written testimony filed with the Internal Revenue Service, Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel Oliver Thomas echoed concerns voiced by members of the Senate Finance and Appropriations committees and the chairman of the House Government Operations Committee in letters to the IRS. All recommended withdrawal of the regulations until they are rewritten to reflect more closely the intent of Congress.

Thomas said his agency's most serious concern is over the regulations' "expansive definition of lobbying." Although noting religious organizations currently are exempted from the proposed rules, he said several provisions could affect religious organizations in the future.

Thomas expressed opposition to a provision that defines grassroots lobbying as including any communication that pertains to legislation and that expresses no specific view on the legislation but is disseminated to persons who generally share the organization's views.

He said the provision's "sweeping definition could imperil some of our nation's finest charitable organizations."

He explained: "By definition, a supporting constituency shares the viewpoint of its organization; if this were not so, the individual constituents would not contribute to the organization's work. Most likely, constituents will also agree with their organization's views on many, if not all, legislative issues. Therefore, the proposed definition of lobbying would include virtually every communication between an organization and its supporters about proposed legislation even if a communication were totally unbiased."

Thomas said the Baptist Joint Committee also objects to a provision that defines expenditures for direct lobbying to include all expenses "in connection with" direct lobbying, adding that definition could include research on specific issues that later become the object of legislation or even general research.

"The use of such vague and inclusive language blurs the line of distinction between lobbying and non-lobbying," he said. He recommended the definition be changed to include only research and preparatory work directly related to an organization's direct lobbying.

Thomas also voiced opposition to another provision that defines grassroots lobbying as a communication reflecting a view on legislation "even if it reaches the public only indirectly, as in a news release submitted to the media." He argued the provision would apply not only to statements made at press conferences but also to those made at public meetings where the press might happen to be.

"By defining grassroots lobbying so as to include such indirect communications, the Internal Revenue Service has included an activity over which an affected organization may have little or no control," he said. "No organization should be penalized for such activity."

Spiritual Awakening Comes
To 56-year-old Mission

By Ken Camp

F-Texas

DALLAS (BP)--When Bob Escamilla came as pastor of Gethsemani Mission in Carrizo Springs, Texas, two and one-half years ago, he was warned it was a tough place to minister.

For 56 years, the Hispanic mission of First Baptist Church of Carrizo Springs had struggled to exist. Twenty-six pastors had come and gone, and membership peaked at about 55 persons.

But two years ago, prayers for spiritual awakening were answered as the mission began to experience unprecedented growth and began to baptize converts at a record pace.

In 1985, after members of the mission participated in a door-to-door distribution of 3,000 "Good News America" marked Bibles, the church baptized 51 new Christians.

That started the momentum which continued throughout 1986 when there were 103 baptisms, about half directly resulting from a Good News America revival, part of Southern Baptists' nationwide simultaneous evangelistic effort.

"We had an awesome year," says Escamilla. "The Lord blessed."

The rapid growth is due primarily to one-on-one witnessing for Christ by church members rather than any organized program, according to Escamilla: "It's an individual, people-to-people effort. The key is we've gone out to get the people."

"I know that lost people won't come to church just to hear me preach. There are many others better than me. The reason they come is that our people are visiting in their homes, touching base with them."

Carrizo Springs, a South Texas city of about 6,500 residents, is predominantly Hispanic. Currently, Gethsemani is the only Hispanic Baptist mission in town.

Gethsemani Mission now averages about 150 people in Sunday school and about 250 in worship. The mission has been self-supporting for almost two years, but it still relies on the sponsoring church for office support. Its building and land also belong to First Baptist Church.

"We only have nine classrooms. We've grown completely out of space," Escamilla reports. "We're either going to have to buy another building or buy some land and build."

"It's a serious problem, but it's a good problem to have. We're just thankful for the way God has blessed."

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Key To Reclaiming Inactive:
Learning How To Listen

By Terri Lackey

N-BSSB

Baptist Press
4/6/87

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Church leaders in pursuit of inactive members or "dropouts" must use not only their heads but their ears to reclaim those who no longer attend regularly, experts reported.

"Listening is the key," said Henry Webb, program design and planning coordinator in the management support group of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department. "The heart of the ingathering program is to learn listening skills before going and visiting these people."

Ingathering: Reclaiming Inactive Church Members is a project developed by the church training department to help churches reach out and minister to inactive members who may include as much as 50 percent of their membership, said Webb.

Stanley Howell, manager of the church training department growth section, said a visitor should not go into the home of the dropout and begin discussing why that person has not been to church for the last year.

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"They should go in and find out how things are going in their life. They should listen to what's going on with that inactive church member," Howell insisted. "Many times the reason a person is inactive has nothing to do with what happened in the church. It could be a personal failure in the person's life which embarrasses them and keeps them from going back to church.

"We must let that person know we are not there to put them on a guilt trip for not going to church. We are there to say, 'Hey, we care about you.'"

Webb said when "half of our people (Southern Baptist Convention membership) are totally inactive in church, we have a dramatic problem."

Of 14.6 million SBC members, 29 percent (4.2 million) are non-resident church members who are prospects for another church. And 20.5 percent (2.9 million) are inactive church members who have not participated in any activities in the church within the past 12 months, he said.

Ministry begins with identifying those church members who are inactive or on the road to becoming inactive, Howell said.

"This ingathering project will not be a quick fix. It is a slow process. The church members will have to be very patient and have confidence the program will work," he added.

To train persons for participation in ingathering, the church training department has just released an equipping center module, "Ingathering: Reclaiming Inactive Church Members."

After leaders, or those who will teach the module, and visitors, or those who will go to the homes of the inactive members, are enlisted, the 13-week process of learning effective listening skills through training at the church or the home of a study leader begins.

Deacons and Sunday school leaders are the primary source of visitors, Webb said. However, others with a capacity to care for others without becoming discouraged if results are not immediate and who can communicate without needing to dominate conversation may be effective visitors, he added.

Effective listening skills, said Webb, are learned by understanding principles of communication.

"Communication, for the most part, is non-verbal," he said. "Visitors must learn to understand body language and the vocal communication of the inactive church member before they can fully understand what he is saying."

Webb said 7 percent of a person's communication is verbal, while 93 percent is non-verbal, with 38 percent of that vocal and 55 percent body language. Vocal communication includes loudness, change of pitch, emphasis on particular words, speed of talking and length of pauses. Body language includes facial expressions, gestures, touching, head and limb movements and the degree of relaxation, he said.

Following the 13-week listening training, visitors are adequately equipped to go to the homes of inactive members, Webb said.

Ultimately, the use of ingathering will help churches identify the person who is on the way to becoming chronically absent, he added: "One of the side benefits of the module is that it dramatizes the need to prevent inactivity and helps church members pay attention to early signs of inactivity. It is much easier to bring a person back into the church after only a few weeks of absenteeism.

"The major fringe benefit of ingathering is that it helps church members provide more adequate care for the potentially inactive member and thereby helps prevent dropouts."

Cherry Chang's Asian Ministry
Bears Fruit In California

By Elizabeth Watson

F-10
(SWBTS)

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Although Cherry Chang was born in the Chinese year of the tiger, she attributes her boldness to Christ alone.

With that boldness she has spent the past 25 years leading the Asian community in Los Angeles to Christ. Because of her impact, the Committee of Southern Baptist History of the California Baptist Convention presented Chang, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, with its Heritage Award last year.

In 1961 Chang and her late husband, Yung Kiang Chang, began the Mandarin Baptist Church in Los Angeles.

"Whenever Yung and I would drive by a bus stop and see Asians, we would offer them a ride home and share the gospel with them," Chang recalls. At other times she would pore over a phone book looking for Asian names and call people and invite them to church.

But Chang doesn't have to do that anymore.

"People just walk in to Mandarin Baptist Church; no need to knock on doors or search for people. They just come," Chang says.

Mandarin Church began with only seven members. It was the first Southern Baptist church established in Hollywood. Today the 800-member church has sponsored three missions that are now self-supporting churches.

Chang came to America with her husband in 1948 to study at Southwestern Seminary. The Chinese Baptist Seminary sent the Changs to Fort Worth, Texas, to secure doctoral degrees in theology and religious education.

"We chose Southwestern because it was the only seminary which allowed women in its doctoral program at the time," Chang says. "My husband wouldn't go to America without me."

One year after the Changs left China, Communists seized control of the Chinese government. "We prayed about returning to China but were convinced it wasn't God's will for us to do that," Chang remembers.

In 1951 the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board invited the Changs to teach at the new Baptist seminary in Taiwan. They worked there until 1961, when they moved to Los Angeles to start Chinese Baptist work.

"God burdened us with the thousands of Mandarin-speaking Chinese flooding America," Chang notes. "There was no Mandarin-speaking mission anywhere in the United States. Most immigrants were settling in Los Angeles, so we decided to begin a ministry there."

The work grew quickly. The church reached out to Mandarin-speaking Chinese, Laotians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Japanese and Indonesians.

Since her husband's death in 1975, Chang has carried on the Asian ministry in Los Angeles. She served as assistant to church ministry at Mandarin Church from 1975 to 1978. The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board appointed her associate missionary and church growth consultant to Asians from 1978 to 1981.

Chang also was a member of the Foreign Mission Board from 1975 to 1983. In her spare time she was a substitute teacher at California Baptist College, directed the Chinese School of Theology for Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and was language coordinator of Woman's Missionary Union for the California Baptist Convention.

Chang is just as bold at 72 as she was in the year of the tiger: "We can make an even bigger impact in Los Angeles. I am accused of having a naive faith. But it is my source of strength and courage. With it, I am full of joy and optimism for today and tomorrow."

N-AMB

'User Friendly' Churches
Needed To Reach USA Cities

By Joe Westbury

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—If Southern Baptists are going to be successful in their attempts to reach cities for Christ, they must develop churches that are "user friendly" in their communities, participants at a national urban training conference were told.

Bill Self, pastor of Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta, said much of the language, structure and organization in Southern Baptist churches tends to make people who are unfamiliar with Baptists feel uncomfortable.

"We need to take a closer look at the way we minister to be sure we are communicating the gospel in terms that the unchurched population can understand," said Self.

"Too often we cater to people who were introduced to church as children and young people who are already familiar with the program," he said. When church programs are designed to meet their needs, the church does not appeal to people unfamiliar with Baptists, he added.

Self, one of a panel of urban ministers from across the nation who addressed the conference, called for Baptists to put aside their rural bias and look to the cities as new mission fields.

The four-day conference, which attracted more than 100 directors of missions and urban pastors from a dozen states, was jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Kentucky Baptist Convention. It was held at St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

The Georgia pastor compared Southern Baptists with Old Testament personalities who saw cities only as evil places void of spiritual worth. Baptists need to replace that mindset with more contemporary ideas taught in the New Testament, he stated.

"The Old Testament is anti-urban — those folks didn't have anything good to say about the cities. Even the Psalmist said he lifted up his eyes to the mountains from which he received his strength. Old Testament people were lost after being expelled from the Garden of Eden and spent all their lives trying to get back in where it was safe and secure.

"But in the New Testament we receive a totally new direction — Christ took his ministry to the heart of the cities where the people lived. The early church was not a rural church but an urban ministry — even the first missionaries were sent to the cities, not to the countryside."

Self, who has been pastor of the urban Atlanta church for 23 years, reminded conference participants the vision Christians are given in the book of Revelation is not a restored Garden of Eden but of a holy city: "We can't get back into the garden and we need to stop trying. Baptists need to realize that when we get to heaven we're going to be city dwellers, not residents of the countryside."

Charles Lee Williamson, director of the missions division for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, suggested the reason that Southern Baptists are not more concerned with urban ministry is because they are captives of their culture and their history: "There are those who would be ready and willing to write off any attempt to evangelize our cities because they say it can't be done, it's too great a task. We must change that mentality."

"When the gospel made its biggest impact on the world at its beginning, the apostle Paul didn't go to the rural countryside but to metropolitan cities — and he didn't back off, even when they beat him.

Williamson said Southern Baptists have a mentality that there is one magic solution through which all cities can be evangelized with the best results, "but that's not reality. Even the Apostle Paul used different strategies in different cities. There is no easy answer, no single way to win America's urban areas to Christ. What we do need is singleness of purpose regardless of the opposition — not singleness of methodology."

N-355B

Even Clowns Must Observe
Practical, Ethical Rules

By Terri Lackey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Donning a primary-color wig and big red nose carries with it real-life responsibilities, and those who enter the make-believe world of clowning quickly learn there are practical and ethical rules to observe, a veteran clown said.

"There are some things clowns just can't do, especially Christian clowns," said Ernie Liebig, a Bullard, Texas, resident whose alter-ego, Happy, has been with him for 38 years.

"Obviously, a Christian clown can't act in derogatory ways. They can't say or do anything obscene or evil," he said. "All of their habits must be of the highest quality."

Liebig and his wife Jean, who plays the clown character, J.J., own a clowning ministry business in Texas where they specialize in worship and seminar performances. He taught several seminars, including one on street ministry, during the sixth annual clowning seminar sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department in late March.

Liebig said the people clowns meet on the street are different from those who are members of their own churches. Expect to be jeered by some, but at the same time, expect to receive the utmost respect from most, he said.

"Whatever you do when you are in costume, remember that when you're on the streets, you're a character and you're taking your church with you," he said.

Liebig cautioned street clowns against assuming the role of their career while in costume.

"For example, if you're a preacher, don't get into your clown costume and start preaching. Let the inwardness of your Christian personality shine through."

He also said it is usually a "no-no" to give out religious tracts, Bibles or Christian literature when clowning for the general public because many times city ordinances rule against it.

Although Liebig said it's "fine (to distribute literature) if you are in a Christian atmosphere," he believes in general public settings clowns should relay their Christianity through actions.

On the practical side, Liebig said the clown's "costume and appearance should always be clean and neat, and he should never be only in half-costume."

Just as bad as being in half-costume -- wearing only a wig and no makeup or vice versa -- is "killing the clown." Killing the clown is the term used when a clown arrives at a performance out of costume or leaves when the performance is over after having changed back into street clothing.

"Never be an unmade clown in public," Liebig said. "When you go into a performance, you are a clown, and when you leave, you are a clown."

Other hints to remember in clowning ministry, Liebig said, include not wearing diamond rings or fancy jewelry when in costume: "Don't wear a watch unless it is an oversized watch. You don't want to kill the character."

Liebig pointed out that clowns usually strive to be "genderless. A clown is a clown. There shouldn't be he-clowns or she-clowns."

The most important role of clown, Liebig said, "is splashing the love of Jesus on others with a handshake, a hug or a smile."