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October 21, 1993

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MARYLAND -- Slapstick 'Moe,' big band DJ returns to pulpit on Sundays; photo.
NORTH CAROLINA -- John Hewett resigns Asheville pastorate.
ATLANTA -- '94 missions needs may suffer if teen volunteers dwindle.
MARYLAND -- Civil rights activist now a Southern Baptist; photo.
TEXAS -- RTVC radio programs accessible to 600 million people worldwide.
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Slapstick 'Moe,' big band DJ
returns to pulpit on Sundays

By Jane Lippy

Baptist Press
10/21/93

ELDERSBURG, Md. (BP)--What do a slapstick comedian, mellow-voiced disc jockey and Baptist preacher have in common?

For Kenneth R. "Kenny" Heath, they're living proof that God uses the entire personality in conveying his message to those who need to hear.

The pastor of Elders Baptist Church in Eldersburg, Md., since 1992 knows from experience: "God saved and called me as a whole person, not just my ability to preach or pastor, but also what I do to relax, for fun and leisure time."

In addition to his ministerial call, Heath has had a lifelong fascination with the Three Stooges comedy team and a talent for impersonating soupbowl-haired Moe and an enjoyment of '30s and '40s big band music -- resulting in a sizable collection of long-playing records -- along with a desire to share the music with other listeners.

"I backed into both (which are unpaid). They have a witness flavor and grow out of my recreation interest," Heath explains.

Heath's role as Moe, which began in high school and continued at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, surfaced again six years ago. He learned no one was doing Moe at the Three Stooges Convention in Philadelphia and decided to audition. "The people went crazy. Since then, I'm invited one weekend a year."

Having contact, but seeing little response from about 2,000 people who have never entered a church, "I was almost ready to give up, but the Lord told me this was the time to pursue an idea I'd been toying with for years." Approaching convention organizers, he asked, "What would you think about a 30-minute, no-pressure Christian worship service before the Sunday program?" Great idea, let's do it, they responded.

Donning his Moe outfit, Heath preached a sermon titled, "For Some Laughs" in a conversational style to a circle of 12 people. With a text from Job, it contained "a basic message of belonging to Jesus. No matter how bad things are, God will enable you to laugh." Heath's "Stooge evangelism" handout resulted in 10 of the 12 desiring more information about Christ. They received the booklet, "Have a Good Life," an offer for talk or prayer and the name of a Baptist church nearby.

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The man who portrayed Larry was one of the 10; another young man from Maryland requested information about Elders Baptist. "I went to Philadelphia to make a contact for our church," Heath enthuses, noting the congregation "prayed from the beginning and specifically on that Sunday."

On Heath's avocational flipside, Saturday afternoons find him hosting "Big Band Boulevard" on WWLG, AM 1360 radio, from Baltimore's Radisson Plaza Hotel. People call in with requests. Between spinning Benny Goodman or Glenn Miller favorites, Heath converses with callers.

Sometimes sensing a need, he offers to pray with or for them.

"I have the freedom to do everything but preach," Heath says. He seeks to convey an appealing image of a minister and church to people in their 50s, 60s and 70s who are without meaningful Christian faith. In a reassuring voice, he closes with "Until next Saturday, may the Good Lord bless you in every way you need it and (with the Kay Kaiser melody in the background) ... I'll be thinking of you."

Sunday, back in the pulpit at 400-member Elders Baptist, Heath encourages, "Submit what you're doing to the Lord. Ask him, 'If this is your will, open doors for me to use my skill or interest to reach somebody for your Son, Jesus.'"

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Lippy is a correspondent for the Baptist True Union, newsjournal of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware. (BP) photo available upon request from (BP) central office in Nashville.

John Hewett resigns
Asheville pastorate

Baptist Press
10/21/93

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)--A resignation announcement of John H. Hewett as pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville was read during the North Carolina church's Oct. 20 prayer meeting in his absence, Baptist Press has learned.

Hewett, 41, was the first moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship formed by Baptist moderates in 1991 and was a founding member of the moderates' former SBC Forum. Hewett has been pastor of the Asheville church since 1985.

The announcement that Hewett was leaving the pastorate for personal and spiritual reasons and undergoing counseling was read to the congregation by Asheville family counselor Michael Hester.

Glenn Wilcox, owner of Wilcox World Travel and Tours and a church member more than 20 years, confirmed the announcement and said, "Our main concern is for John and (his wife) June and their two boys and other family members, that God's Holy Spirit will be with them in these difficult times and help them through it.

"We appreciate the leadership John has given us through the years," Wilcox said. "The church is a great church, made up of a lot of wonderful, wonderful people. And it will come through this, even though it will be difficult."

Hewett, a Florida native, earlier had been a pastor in St. Louis, serving as the 1984-85 chairman of the Missouri Baptist Convention's Order on Business Committee; and in Graefenburg and Elburg, Ky.

Hewett earned a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1977 and a Ph.D. there, specializing in theological and social ethics, in 1981.

He has been an adjunct faculty member at Southern and at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

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'94 missions needs may suffer
if teen volunteers dwindle

By David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--Fearing a drop in the number of Activator mission teams, volunteer coordinators are asking Acteens to consider going on a mission trip as well as attend next summer's National Acteen Convention.

Limited finances often force teams to choose between missions work and the convention, which is held every five years, said Marti Solomon, national Acteens specialist for the Woman's Missionary Union.

A decrease would mean fewer Southern Baptist missionaries receive assistance for such projects as Vacation Bible School, Big A Club and inner-city missions work, said Valerie Hardy, associate director of short-term volunteers for the Home Mission Board.

Acteens are young women in grades seven through 12. Activators must be at least 15 years old or have completed the ninth grade to go on a mission project, Solomon said.

Between 12,000 and 15,000 Acteens are expected for the national convention June 21-24 in Birmingham, Ala. During the 1989 convention, the Home and Foreign Missions boards assigned half the previous year's number of Activator teams to mission projects, Solomon said.

Last year, about 190 Activator teams worked on home and foreign mission projects, she said. A shortage of teams will especially hurt smaller churches in new work areas because they often need smaller teams the size of Activator groups, Hardy said.

"That is significant when you consider that so many of these groups go where only maybe one or two groups are requested for the whole summer," she said. "Some of these places may not get help at all."

Last year, volunteers filled 72 percent of missionary's requests for summer missions teams, the highest percentage in recent years, Hardy said.

Solomon said she's written the supervisors for Activator teams from the past three years, asking them to pray about going to both a mission project and the national convention. "I'm just praying that people will respond to that challenge."

More information about Acteen Activators is available from state WMU directors. Information about summer missions opportunities are available from state conventions or the Home Mission Board at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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Civil rights activist
now a Southern Baptist

By Ron Chaney

Baptist Press
10/21/93

ROCKVILLE, Md. (BP)--Bill Collins never imagined he would become a Southern Baptist. He aspired to be pastor in a black church, go to Morehouse College where Martin Luther King Jr. had attended and, in general, avoid white people.

But because of the influence of Martin Luther King Jr., Martin Luther King Sr. and a director of missions named Harold Graham, Collins now is the black church relations consultant for Montgomery (Md.) Baptist Association in Rockville, Md., and pastor of a black Southern Baptist mission in Silver Spring, Md.

Collins lived in Norfolk, Va., when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968. When Collins, a firm civil rights advocate, heard the news, he quit his job, determined he would never put himself under a white person. He withdrew money from his retirement account to finance a business that catered to black interests. He rented a store in downtown Norfolk and sold African clothes, carvings and books on liberation.

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Determined to better himself, Collins earned a general equivalency high school diploma and entered college. A lifelong church attender, he also joined a Bible study. That study changed his life's direction, he said. He felt a call to ministry and realized he could no longer maintain his store. He sold the business and became the pastor of a church in Leesburg, Va.

"At this point I didn't want to have much to do with white people," he recounted. "We believed in liberation theology, that the white church had used the Bible to enslave black people and keep us down. I believed that."

He took a civil rights tack to ministry which he affirmed was good for the church. "I never did preach hate but I was hard on people, African people, to stand up for what's right and not allow themselves to be set back by the system.

"My ministry was to preach peace, liberation; that's what you've got to do for yourself." He said his message was "liberation through salvation."

After his wife transferred to Atlanta with her job, Collins wanted to attend Morehouse College and then lead a large middle-class black church, hoping Martin Luther King Sr. would help him out.

"Daddy King, Martin Luther King's father, ... was a personal friend of mine. I was looking to him to help me get a church."

But a small church on the outskirts of Atlanta called him as pastor for a six-month trial period. Collins hesitated because he believed he was destined for a large church but King encouraged him to accept Noonday Baptist Church's conditions.

On his installation day the church was filled. Looking over the crowd, Collins noticed one white face. After the service the white man introduced himself: Harold Graham, a Southern Baptist director of missions for Noonday Baptist Association.

Graham told him, "... if you ever need anything then let me know."

Collins was overtly polite. "I said 'thank you' to him, but in my mind I said, 'thank you but no thank you.'" He never expected to have contact with Graham again.

But at Vacation Bible School time, Collins discovered a lack of resources for his church. What was he to do? He called Harold Graham.

Graham gathered a van load of materials and carted them out to the church to present to the VBS workers. Collins was surprised and pleased. "They had the best Vacation Bible School they have ever had because the teachers were ready and they had the materials."

Collins began to attend the ministers fellowship for the Noonday association even though he was the one black face in the white crowd. "I stayed there and fellowshiped with them and after a year we applied for membership in that association.

"That's how I became Southern Baptist," Collins said. His church became the first black Southern Baptist church in Marietta, Ga.

His wife transferred to the Washington area in 1986 and Collins began work with the Montgomery Baptist Association and also became pastor of Koinonia Baptist Mission.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the (BP) central office in Nashville.

RTVC radio programs accessible
to 600 million people worldwide By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
10/21/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Based on standard industry measures, radio programming by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission is accessible to an estimated U.S. audience of 150 million and a worldwide population of more than 600 million.

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"I am amazed at the doors that are opening because of the changing world geography," said Ed Malone, vice president of radio services for the RTVC. "We are receiving requests and inquiries from countries that have been closed to us in the past. Something is happening out there. God is moving in a unique way and doors are opening. There is greater opportunity for proclaiming the gospel than ever before ... and we must step in."

Malone said a major station in Monrovia, Liberia, recently began airing six weekly RTVC programs as a result of seeing an article about the programs in "BEAM International," the commission's quarterly magazine.

"The station reaches well over 1.5 million people in Africa," he said. "In just a month and a half we have had an increase of 130 stations carrying our programs."

Malone said RTVC President Jack Johnson's work in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union also has resulted in radio and television programs that are now reaching millions.

"We are looking at satellite networks, shortwave systems and internationally privatized stations around the world to carry our programs," Malone said. "For the remainder of this year and next year we are emphasizing our international radio marketing strategy."

Malone said he plans to attend the European Convention of Broadcasters and the International Broadcasters Convention, both in the summer of 1994, in an effort to increase the RTVC's outreach in Europe and Asia.

"Numbers are a funny things," he said. "Some people tend to play fast and loose with their audience estimates, but we tend to be very conservative. While it is important to reach as many people for Christ as possible, we are not to be obsessed with numbers for pride's sake. We give God the credit for giving us these wonderful opportunities and are grateful that we can take advantage of them."

Three of the RTVC's weekly radio programs celebrate anniversaries in 1994. "MasterControl" will be 35 years old. "Country Crossroads" and "Powerline" will be 25.

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U.S. largest mission field,
Palau tells Southwesterners

By Susan Simko

Baptist Press
10/21/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The United States is one of the world's largest mission fields, international evangelist Luis Palau said in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's chapel Oct. 19.

Palau, who has preached to 10 million people in nearly 60 nations, said he concentrates half his ministry efforts on the United States. Palau was in Fort Worth, Texas, for a five-day evangelistic crusade.

"America needs the gospel of Jesus, the basic gospel, all over again. It's like the dark ages. The pagans have taken over," Palau said. "I believe, in the U.S.A., there are literally millions of Americans who live with a cloud of guilt unresolved, who have left the church but who grew up in Sunday school."

Those non-Christians are hungry for hope, Palau said.

"People are angry at secular answers. People are angry at the responses from government and politicians and even educational people," he said. "They need to hear the simple, powerful gospel of Christ. What an opportunity for us."

Church leaders -- especially older ones -- overlook chances to evangelize because apathy seeps into their ministry, Palau said. They begin preaching family values and anti-abortion messages to lost people who need to hear how to be saved instead, he said.

"The temptation is to begin to not give up on the gospel, not to become a heretic, not to throw it out, but just to go easy on it," he said. "The gospel truly is the need of the United States of America, and I tell you, brothers and sisters, don't lose your passion. Get back to it again and again."

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Ministers also must present the gospel as a message that demands a response, Palau said.

"We mustn't engag in informational evangelism," he said. "All these are action verbs, where the Lord says, 'Come, repent, believe, receive, open.'"

For every non-Christian to have the opportunity to respond to the gospel, every Christian must evangelize, Palau said. No one should rely on crowd-drawing crusades, he said.

"Don't wait for the evangelist to come," he said. "Even if you become a professor at the university or a teacher at the seminary or you go to the mission field, remember this: You can be God's instrument to turn men to light from darkness, to God from Satan, to the kingdom of heaven."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Racetrack ministry receives
needed boost from church

By Bob E. Mathews

Baptist Press
10/21/93

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Among the 286 horse racetracks across America, one has a Southern Baptist mission on its back side (the stable area).

At Remington Park in Oklahoma City, First Southern Baptist Church of Del City adopted the ministry of racetrack chaplain Pete Crisswell as a mission.

Crisswell came to Remington Park when it opened in 1988 after five years as chaplain at Louisiana racetracks. Known around the track as Chaplain Pete, Crisswell has ministered to the hundreds of back side workers. In Louisiana, the Baptists gave little support while the Assemblies of God churches "threw open their doors" to him.

A 1988 story about Crisswell in the Baptist Messenger, Oklahoma Baptists' newsjournal, garnered some church support for his ministry with Steve Ruiz, pastor of Woodcrest Baptist Church near Guthrie, Okla., assisting in the ministry.

Recently, however, the Del City church's leaders adopted a program of "turning the Sunday school inside out." The project was the brainchild of minister of education Rick Kunz who said he realized "we have an obligation to reach the folks God sends to our Sunday schools, but another obligation to reach those on the outside, as the Great Commission says."

That's what led to the adoption of Crisswell's ministry as a mission.

Within three weeks from the first discussions with Crisswell about the possibility of sponsorship, the men's ministry of the Del City church took a major step. The church rented the state convention's large revival tent and set it up on the track back side.

Two nights of services also included free hamburgers and barbecue for the track workers and their families. The Del City men did the cooking and mingled with the racetrack personnel before, during and after the singing and preaching.

Visiting evangelist Michael Gott's messages were interpreted into Spanish by Danny Sherman, a member of the Del City church and a Spanish teacher at a local Christian school, and Clif Garvey, a member of Bodine Baptist Church.

The two nights of food, fellowship and services resulted in 42 professions of faith, plus four for assurance and three rededications.

"This was something that had never been done before here or at any other racetrack in the country," the chaplain noted. The tent meeting was a follow-up to Spanish-language Bible studies started Sept. 23 by Sherman. Forty-four men attended the first session which featured a gospel film, "Fist of Fury," translated into Spanish. Four men made professions of faith at that event.

The back side population is about 33 percent Spanish, Crisswell said, and the Spanish-language efforts are necessary to reach that segment.

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The chaplain said most people don't realize the working conditions on the back side of a racetrack. "There is tremendous pressure here. Owners are under pressure to produce a winning horse. Trainers are under pressure due to the owners' investments in the horses. Jockeys are under pressure to perform in a very dangerous profession."

He described back side jobs as 60-hour-a-week duties, starting at 4:30 a.m.

As a former jockey and farrier, Crisswell expresses a special sensitivity for groomers and exercise boys and girls. "They live with horses that are worth more money than they'll see in their lifetime. The horse comes first. They often feel like second-class citizens, of lesser value than an animal," he said, adding the workers also are souls who need the gospel.

Eighteen of the converts in the tent services were Hispanics. As part of the follow-up, the chaplain teaches classes on the importance of baptism. Crisswell said half of the Spanish workers go back to Mexico in the off season. "If we can win them to Christ, they will go back home as witnesses to their families."

Mike Hand, the Del City church's minister to families and assistant to pastor Tom Elliff, emphasizes the church is not trying to take over Crisswell's ministry, known as the cowboy church, but is simply endeavoring to involve its laymen in a ministry outside the church walls. "This doesn't mean we want to be the only ones ministering out here. Pete can use lots of help," Hand said.

Crisswell agreed, noting the back side population can reach as high as 3,000 during parts of the thoroughbred and quarter horse racing seasons.

Ordained to the ministry by the Del City church in 1982, Crisswell became acquainted with Elliff and during conversations, sometimes at high school football games, they talked about possibilities of helping with ministering to Spanish workers at the track. A visit by Hand to the track impressed on him the needs there. "It's amazing what Pete's been able to do out here and the respect these people have for him," Hand said.

Crisswell told Hand he and 40 or 50 people in his cowboy church had been fasting and praying God would send them some help. The chaplain holds services in a small chapel near a back side cafeteria.

Hand said the Del City church will not have a financial investment in the mission but "will support them with manpower, literature, chairs, vehicles, whatever they need." He said the tent meeting, including food, was the church's first endeavor at assisting the mission.

"This has been a dream of mine for years," Crisswell said. "Up until now, except for First Southern, there have really been few churches that seemed to give a spiritual hoot about it and I praise God for this move." Crisswell expressed hope other churches will follow the Del City church's lead and adopt racetrack ministries as missions.

Elliff said, "When people question what our presence on the back side of Remington Park says about our conviction, my answer would be, 'It says we're convicted that men need Christ. Our determination to carry the gospel to the world does not mean we endorse the world's lifestyles. It means we just need to carry the gospel where the people are who need it.'"

Not all of Crisswell's ministry is to the back side. Before the races, he goes to the jockey's dressing room and has a prayer session with those who will join him in a small side room. Often the sessions include a brief Bible study.

Crisswell is a member of the Racetrack Chaplaincy of America organization which receives support from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Stancil: Tenure denied due to political agenda," dated 10/20/93, please correct the third paragraph vote total to 16-9, not 17-16.

Thanks,
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