


 OUTSTANDING  
CHURCHES OF  
AMERICA

# THE CHURCH THAT **DARED** TO FOLLOW THE LORD

*When the gentle breeze of Pentecost set the Southern Baptist congregation afire for the Lord, it meant trouble at quiet Green Street Baptist Church. The traditionalists issued an ultimatum . . . and the pastor, the church staff and much of the congregation quietly picked up and left.*

BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

**N**o matter how you view it, a split in a church is always painful. The fact it may be necessary does not lessen the pain—even though it

may justify it. Nor does the sometime necessity of division make it easier to explain these schisms to skeptical worldlings who are constantly sneering—or laughing—at Christians who preach love and unity yet never seem to be able to get along with each other. Broken relationships are always sad, even if the amputation is necessary to save the life of the patient.

The causes of division are as varied as the people in the churches. Some churches split over minor issues: the color of choir robes, who plays the piano, how the pastor's wife dresses, or any imaginable (or unimaginable) reason or excuse.

Other churches divide over somewhat deeper issues: the application of social justice in the community or world, a critical difference in some doctrinal position, or over such a basic issue as whether the church is going to grow spiritually or remain in its old, stagnant, traditional ruts.

Baptists, in particular, it seems, are people of division. Perhaps this is true because Baptists make up the largest segment of Protestant Christianity; therefore

their divisions are more apparent. Perhaps it is because they are governed by congregational rule, meaning every member of the congregation is expected to try to influence everyone else to his point of view. Whatever the reasons, Baptists admit much of their phenomenal growth is due to their inability to get along. As a result, they divide—often in anger—and a group pulls out, goes down the road and starts another church. Later they chuckle about it and confess they are responsible for the adage: "We multiply by dividing."

Baptists are not the only ones guilty of splitting, of course. Many Pentecostal churches have had similar experiences. So have the Presbyterians. Recently it's the non-denominational Charismatic churches which are having their problems with divisions on various doctrines such as "faith," "discipleship" and "who's-in-charge-here" causing people to consider seriously their relationship with each other.

Many churches spawned in division are like shooting stars. They burn brightly for a short time, then gradually sputter out. Birthed in rebellion and bitterness,



Dr. Buddy Price



they lack the spiritual acumen necessary to achieve the blessing of God. Others, made up of malcontents, divide only to divide again—and again. Still others, proclaiming themselves “right” and the group they left as “wrong,” have their roots in spiritual pride—which quickly spells their downfall.

Are all church schisms wrong? There are those, especially those who feel the highest call of the church is the call of unity, who would say so. These are the ones who say that the seeds of destruction are planted with every act of non-submission. They feel no matter how “wrong” one group may be, to disrupt the unity of the church is sin. Those guilty of pulling out can never, therefore, be blessed by God.

Yet if you trace the history of the outstanding churches in America back to their origins, you would find many of them came into being as the result of a church schism. Indeed, many denominations—including the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)—were formed out of a division.

The purpose of this article is not to discuss the rightness or wrongness of church splits. It is enough to point out that one of the great paradoxes of the Christian life is that the application of the teachings of the Prince of Peace often brings a sword which divides. The purpose of this article is to highlight a particular church, Grace Baptist Church of High Point, North Carolina, which is the result of a split with the much larger and more traditional Green Street Baptist Church. The issue was the Holy Spirit. The group which left was composed primarily of church leaders and included the pastor, Dr. E. W. “Buddy” Price, Jr., and the entire church staff. From the very beginning the new church has prospered.

This article will analyze what took place and give some insight into why the Lord is blessing Grace Baptist Church—even though it came into being as a result of a painful division between people who had lived and worshipped together for many years.

High Point, a town of about 70,000, is in the heart of the North Carolina Bible Belt. Some of the state’s strongest Bible churches are located in the wealthy tri-

city area of Greensboro/High Point/Winston-Salem. Wake Forest, the state’s Baptist college, is located in Winston-Salem. Southeastern Baptist Seminary is located on the old Wake Forest campus. Not only that, but High Point has for years been known as one of the wealthiest small cities in America. Many of the Southern Baptist churches are affluent, filled with highly educated, wealthy people. In short, it’s not only acceptable to be a Baptist in High Point—it’s downright fashionable.

Thus it is understandable how an outbreak of spiritual fervor, accompanied by healings, miracles and speaking in tongues, could quickly upset the status quo of such a church—and cause division.

That’s essentially what happened in Green Street Baptist Church in High Point.

mittee of 15 which recommended the reorganization of agencies several years ago. He was known not only as a warm-hearted, Bible-believing pastor who genuinely loved his flock, he was also well known as a pastor to other pastors who often made their way to him to seek his counsel and help.

Price seemed to have a way of understanding people. He entered the ministry later in life, having first served



A former YMCA has housed Grace Baptist Church since 1980.



Jason Harris is baptized in a member’s pool by Dr. Buddy Price.

For many years the Green Street Baptist Church was acclaimed as one of the “leading” churches in the state, even in the entire Southern Baptist Convention. Its pastor of 22 years, Dr. Buddy Price, was one of the most loved and respected pastors in the SBC. Three times chairman of the general board of the Baptist State Convention, he had also served on the prestigious executive board of the SBC and was chairman of a special com-

as an engineering professor at North Carolina State. Following his call to the ministry, he returned to graduate school and earned a doctor of theology from Southwestern Baptist Seminary in 1951. He came to Green Street in 1957 and built the church to a membership of almost 3,000.

During this time Price had gathered around him what many North Carolina Baptists felt was the most qualified church staff in the state. Mel

Anderson, a former rancher from Colorado with a master’s in religious education from Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, had been with Price for 15 years as the church’s business manager and minister of education. Al Purvis, the minister of youth, had been on the staff for five years. Purvis held a master’s degree in theology from Southern Seminary. The last addition to the staff was Dr. Jim Davidson,



the minister of music, who had been called five months before the split. Davidson, a musician of some reputation among Southern Baptists, had earned a doctor of sacred music from Southern Seminary.

Everything was looking up at Green Street Baptist. The building fund held more than \$11 million. Plans were finished to build an entirely new church plant in a lovely area of town away from the rather seedy-looking downtown location which was more and more frequented by unsightly and unwanted "street people"—drug addicts, winos, the poor, the unemployed, the homeless and run-away youth.

Shortly after the Charismatic movement swept across America, a large number of Christians, representing many denominations in the tri-city area, began meeting on a regular basis. They called themselves the Piedmont Prayer Retreat. They were convened by a board of Spirit-baptized believers from a number of mainline Protestant churches—including several from Green Street Baptist. Monthly teaching seminars were held in neutral places such as an old hotel in downtown High Point, the chapel at High Point College, or in various school auditoriums. Every effort was made to keep from identifying with any church or denomination. Even though the group was openly Charismatic in worship and teaching, a surprisingly small number of classical Pentecostals attended the monthly teaching seminars. Most of those who attended with regularity came from the mainline denominational churches.

During the 1970s many of the nation's better-known Charismatic teachers were invited to High Point. Among these were Charles Simpson and myself—both of us former Southern Baptist pastors—who visited on several occasions. The growing number of people from the Green Street Baptist Church who sat under this teaching testified they found no conflict in what we were saying and Price's teaching, under whom they had sat for years. Some of these had been Spirit-baptized back in 1970 following a spiritual renewal emphasis at the church. Even though Price had not openly advocated speaking in tongues, he was preaching the necessity of all Christians being filled with the Holy Spirit and encouraging his flock to seek all the gifts God had for them. Those of his church members who attended the Piedmont Prayer Retreat—including his church staff and several of his deacons—found the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit actually complemented Dr. Price's

teaching.

During these years a number of people from the tri-city area, including some of the leaders at Green Street Baptist, began attending various conferences at Montreat, North Carolina, sponsored by a group known as Christian Believers United (CBU). As one of the principal speakers at the annual November meetings, which were attended each year by more than 2,000 people from the Pied-

mont area, I had another opportunity to make friends with this enthusiastic and spiritually eager group from Green Street Baptist. At one of the November meetings, I asked all those from Green Street Baptist to stand. There were more than 100 present including Price, Mel Anderson and Al Purvis, who were by their presence indicating their approval of this joyful journey their flock was taking as they sought the face of God and asked the Holy Spirit to fill them with power for life and service.

The other profound influence on those members of Green Street Baptist Church who were seeking the power of God through the Holy Spirit came through the teaching of a former Presbyterian missionary, the late Adger McKay. McKay, who had spent time in Mexico as an agricultural specialist, was living in Hendersonville (later he moved to Montreat) in the western section of the state. Every week he traveled to the High Point/Greensboro area to teach in a home prayer meeting, convened originally by a High Point widow, Mrs. Francis Dalton.

McKay, a winsome man with a deep

ministry—especially in the High Point area—is still apparent.

By 1978 the tensions at Green Street Baptist Church were beginning to surface. A number of people sensed the Lord wanted a "free church" in High Point—a church unencumbered by dead tradition, free in worship, a place where the gifts of the Holy Spirit could flow freely and the supernatural would be looked upon as the norm rather than the bizarre, a church which would not limit its mission vision and giving to one denominational segment, where all people (not just the affluent) would feel at home, yet a church balanced in tradition and doctrine. These people sensed the Piedmont Prayer Retreat could not meet this need since it had no New Testament government, no pastoral oversight and no continuing structure. It was primarily a rally point for all the Spirit-baptized and for those who were hungry for a deeper spiritual life but had not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As such it played an important role in the Christian community but would probably fade away when a dynamic New Testament church came into being.



**Dr. Jim Davidson, music minister, directs a special performance of Grace's 40-member choir and 20-member orchestra in the gym which functions as the congregation's main auditorium.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH



Price's vision, on the other hand, was similar—but different. Deeply steeped in Southern Baptist heritage, he longed to see the Green Street Baptist Church renewed, but he resisted all efforts to start a new church. Instead of looking for a new church, he was praying for spiritual renewal to come to the flock he had pastored and loved for 22 years. To facilitate this renewal, he encouraged his growing number of Spirit-baptized

*A number of people wanted a church unencumbered by dead tradition, free in worship, a place where the gifts of the Holy Spirit could flow freely.*

believers to gather in small groups for prayer. A man of prayer himself, he spent an hour every morning—at the beginning of the day—agonizing himself in prayer for the direction of his life, the direction of the church, and in intercession for the leaders at Green Street Baptist.

"I wanted Green Street Baptist Church to be a New Testament church, open to the flow of the Holy Spirit as He is moving today," he told me. "I was spending a large amount of time in the Scriptures, and was leading the church in Scripture studies, finding out what God was saying to us and putting that into practice in our church structure and in our personal lives."

To stimulate the people, Price brought in Charles Simpson, a former Southern Baptist pastor and leading teacher in the Charismatic movement, to speak to the Green Street Baptist Church for a few days. Simpson was warmly received by the large number of Charismatics in the congregations, but basically ignored by the rest who didn't seem to understand his emphasis.

Shortly after this, Price invited Peter

Lord to minister to the church. Lord, a Southern Baptist pastor from Florida, was not known as a "Charismatic," but he had led his Park Avenue Baptist Church in Titusville, Florida, into deep areas of renewal. Price felt his message might be better accepted by the mainline traditionalists in the Green Street congregation. Instead, Lord opened his meetings by calling on the people to repent of their sins and to seek the face of God. He said all those who were not willing to "move on with God," who were not willing to yield their lives and their businesses to the Holy Spirit's leading—regardless of what he might ask—should stay away the rest of the week, allowing those in the church who were serious about the Lordship of Jesus Christ to move on with God.

The people took him at his word. The majority boycotted the meetings. In fact, even some of the Charismatics who had not considered the full ramifications of being "Spirit-led" began to back off. It was becoming apparent that following God was going to mean more than clapping hands to Scripture choruses and saying "Hallelujah!" in response to miracles. Even Price, who so longed to see his church move into renewal, said he sensed God might be leading them by the way of the cross. There was a deep sense that before real life could come, some of them would have to experience spiritual—and even vocational—death.

By this time the traditionalist at Green Street Baptist, realizing the Charismatic movement was not going to go away—in fact was becoming apparent in the congregation—started a counter move to try to ward off what they felt was an unhealthy threat. Even though Baptists are not a "creedal" people, there are a number of unwritten creeds which flow deeply in the Baptist stream. One of them is a deep feeling that while the gifts of the Spirit were certainly valid during the first century, they are no longer part of God's design for the church. Thus anyone who spoke in tongues, believed in divine healing, or ministered deliverance was either of the devil, ignorant, uncouth and thus not qualified to be part of God's movement among the educated and affluent; or troublemakers who should be dealt with severely before they infected others in the congregations with their "strange doctrines."

During these times it was not uncommon to hear members of Green Street Baptist Church say—in reference to speaking in tongues—"I don't care if it is in the Bible, it's not *Baptist*." A strange phraseology for people who

proudly said, "We have no creed but the Bible," and who called themselves "People of the Book."

In assaying the damage being done to the church by the "tongues speakers" (and it needs to be noted that there had been no speaking in tongues or other supernatural occurrences in any of the public meetings, and at that time Price had stated publicly that he "was not personally involved in speaking in tongues or with any movement that might be interpreted as outside the traditional ministry of Southern Baptist churches"), the deacon leadership of the church was hard pressed to come up with adequate charges against the Charismatic element.

There was no way even the most antagonistic traditionalist could accuse Price or the church staff of being "of the devil." Nor could they logically say the Charismatic element in the church was ignorant and uncouth. Numbered among the leadership of the Charismatics were several medical doctors, including Angus Sargeant and Alton Reeder, both prominent specialists in internal medicine, and Kent Bennett, a well known and deeply loved specialist in obstetrics and gynecology. Also among the groups were men such as Cecil Wilson, Jim Nelson and Richard Price, successful leaders in the business community, as well as schoolteachers, musicians and lawyers. The city engineer, Carl Wills, who had part interest in a firm which manufactures socks for racquetball players, was part of the groups. All in all, almost ten percent of the huge church, including a number among the active leadership, joyfully proclaimed they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Unable to call these respected people "of the devil" or "ignorant and uncouth," the only charge left was they had "departed from Baptist doctrine"—a tough charge to make stick since Baptists proclaim they have no doctrinal creed. What was apparent to those moving in the Spirit was the fact the traditionalists were actually resisting God's call for the church to take another step deeper into the Christian life. But this accusation was strongly denied by those who opposed the Charismatics. They stated they were "defending the faith" and "protecting the church" from wolves who were coming in to eat the lambs.

The Charismatics, on the other hand, did not always exert wisdom in their methods of sharing their new experience. In their enthusiasm they often left the impression that church members who had not had an experience similar to theirs

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were somehow "second class." The traditionalists interpreted this as a slam against their relationship with God. They reacted defensively, and in early 1979 several of them—including several women in the church—came to the deacons. (NOTE: In most Baptist churches, the deacons are the ruling board. The pastor and staff are in forced submission to this board which in turn answers to the congregation from whence it gathers its authority.)

These people expressed deep concern that the "Charismatics" and the "tongues-speakers" were taking over the church. Lists had been made of those who attended the CBU conferences at Montreat. Charges of association with non-Baptists at the Piedmont Prayer Retreat seminars were made. It was pointed out that the Charismatics were holding "clandestine" meetings in various homes around the community and sooner or later they would try to hold meetings in the church building itself.

Even though Price himself was not actively leading any of those groups—in fact, no one knew whether he had ever actually attended any of the meetings—it was obvious he was in sympathy with what was going on, was not discouraging it from the pulpit, and was instead preaching constantly from the Book of Acts and making many references to the Holy Spirit and miracles. Besides, there were substantial rumors that his wife, Bev, did in fact speak in tongues and had, on several occasions, been heard to do so at a women's prayer meeting. This, coupled with the fact that the senior staff member, Mel Anderson, and his wife not only spoke in tongues but openly attended all the Charismatic meetings (most suspected he was there to represent the pastor in proxy), and that Al Purvis, the youth director, was enthusiastically leading the young people to seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit and encouraging them to follow the Lord outside traditional Baptist methods, were all the reasons the deacons needed.

In January 1979, the deacons drew up a set of "guidelines" to restrict the move of the Holy Spirit and attempt to force it to flow only in the traditional Baptist stream. The last of these "guidelines" contained a specific statement that anyone in the congregation who could not fully accept all the conditions should leave the church. The guidelines were presented to the congregation where they passed by majority vote.

The handwriting was on the wall for the Charismatics, who felt they had no

choice but to quench the Holy Spirit, or leave.

There was a third choice. They have fought the deacon directives by either openly refusing to submit or in the typical Baptist way of resorting to politics and electing a new deacon board which was sympathetic to the Charismatic position. However, Price forbade his Charismatic friends from considering this, and it was never again brought up as an option.

Therefore, a split was inevitable.

The only real question was: would Price and the church staff go with the Charismatics, or would they remain with the traditionalists at Green Street?

While Price was making his decision, the Charismatics began meeting in homes. A 10-member steering committee, with Bennett as chairman, was formed. Yet even the largest home, that belonging to Cecil and Sarah Wilson, could not contain the more than 200 enthusiastic people who, now freed from the restrictions placed on them by the institution, were joyfully making plans to form another church.

During this time Price was meeting with his church staff, praying and seeking God's direction for their lives. Both Anderson and Purvis had no questions about joining the new group. Davidson, however, the minister of music, had been at Green Street only five months. Besides, neither he nor his wife, Rosemary, as professional church musicians (Davidson was a master pipe organist), were comfortable with the joyful, hand-clapping, Scripture-chorus-singing which was so much a part of the Charismatic worship.

The determining factor seemed to be which direction Price would go. Despite references, the staff was extremely loyal to their 60-year-old pastor. They determined that whichever way he went, they would go also.

The choice was not an easy one. There was no promise the new group would even form as a church. As an experienced pastor, Price knew how easy it was for people to build up a head of enthusiastic steam, only to lose it on the uphill grade of trying to start a new church in a small town which was extremely institutionally oriented. The new group had no organization—in fact, it had not even met together as a group at that time. It had no place to meet—yet in High Point the word "church" literally meant "building," with little or no understanding of the church as a body of people which needed a building only as a shelter in which to carry on body ministry. There was no promise of salary. And, most im-



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portant to Price, there was no promise, if a new church did form, that the local Baptist association would admit them to membership.

On the other hand, the door was open for Price to remain at Green Street where he had been pastor 22 years. In fact, the deacons and congregation were hoping he would stay, especially since the Charismatics had not indicated they were going to leave. They knew they were big enough and rich enough to recoup from the split. The money in the building fund was secure. Much of it, of course, had been donated by those members who were now leaving. But since they seemed to be leaving without a fight, then there was no reason, under Buddy Price's leadership, the traditionalists could not get right on with the new building program. In fact, the projected exodus by the Charismatics had stirred up a great deal of new enthusiasm by many of those who had not been active in the church before. It seemed to be the promise of a new day. All Price would have to do was obey the "guidelines," refrain from preaching about the gifts of the Spirit and stay away from the Charismatic conferences.

Price considered all this. He considered the fact if he stayed with Green Street he would be in an ideal position to help the new church get started without

interference from the traditionalists. He considered that he might even be able to get them accredited as a legitimate Baptist church, meaning they might qualify for money to help them get started. He also considered the gamble he would be taking if he left and went with them.

Included in this was the possibility of losing his Baptist identity, and the chance he was leading his staff out into the unknown with him. At 60 years of age, he was nearing what most ministers considered retirement age. But his staff members were younger—with their careers ahead of them. Since they had expressed loyalty to him, declaring they would follow any way he went, was it right to lead them into the unknown with him?

But, as Price told me, the Holy Spirit would not release him. He knew he had no choice but to "stay under the cloud," even if he felt a bit uncomfortable with his traveling companions. He knew he was safe as long as he stayed at Green Street and obeyed all the rules. But with the new group, there were no rules. No "guidelines, which can, when crossing the wilderness, be comforting. All he had was the promise of the presence of God, the pledge of loyalty from his wife and staff and the enthusiastic applause of a group of untried, untested companions.

It was a true Moses experience, only his flock had already left Egypt and was waiting on the other side of the Red Sea to see if their leader was going to join them.

The spirit of adventure and the warm assurance of God that "I am in this move," were too much for Price to resist. On April 1, Price, Mel Anderson, Al Purvis and Jim Davidson all resigned from Green Street Baptist Church.

The following week Bennett convened the steering committee. The committee issued a call to Price to come as the new pastor of the nameless church without a membership or place to meet. They also extended a call to Anderson, Purvis and Davidson to join the "church staff" in the same positions they held at Green Street—plus raises for everyone.

The result was a staff without a church. However, as everyone seemed to understand, the new church was operating under an entirely different set of principles than the church from which they came. Everyone seemed to trust one another. Even though there were numerous suggestions to the steering committee, no one was vying for position—or demanding to be heard. Everyone seemed eager for the pastor to take authority.

At first Price resisted this. He had



never known anything but congregational rule. During this struggle, just a couple of weeks after the committee had called him as pastor, I met with the steering committee at Cecil Wilson's house. That night, as we prayed together, the Lord spoke through prophecy, saying He had chosen Buddy Price to lead the new church. The church, He said, was to be a church unlike other churches in that God would speak to the leader, as He had done in biblical days, and the pastor would lead the flock as a true shepherd, with apostolic authority. The prophecy continued that God wanted Price not only to submit his ministry to elders (which would be appointed in God's time) but also to listen to the voice of God as He spoke through the people. It was evident, though, that God wanted final authority to rest with the elders who would, in turn, look to their pastor as their spiritual overseer. The word stated there would never be any conflict as long as those in authority remained friends who trusted each other, submitted to one another and sought the Lord together—determined not to move until they were all in one accord.

As a man of wisdom, Price knew that prophecy should be used as confirmation—not direction. He decided to go slowly in changing the Baptist structure. Even though the members of his flock all trusted him, he also knew they had their roots deep in Baptist tradition. He knew, too, that he was still uncomfortable with the concept of taking full authority. Until the Lord spoke to him and told him to take charge, he would continue to rely upon the body.

"One accord" seemed to be the password for the new church. The first regular meeting was on the John Wesley College campus with 225—nearly all out of the Green Street Baptist Church—in attendance. The group decided on the name Grace Baptist Church and immediately applied to the Central Baptist Association for membership. Within a month the group had outgrown their meeting place and had shifted to the auditorium at Tomlosin Grammar School, where they would meet for the next one and a half years.

However, the new group did not find initial favor among the area Baptists. The deacons at Green Street, upset that Price and the staff had gone with the new church, protested to the Central Baptist Association. The association's credentials committee sided with the protestors and refused to admit the newly formed Grace Baptist Church as a member of the Central Baptist Association.

The association's director, J. D. Harrod, told the *Winston-Salem Sentinel* that the association declined to admit the Grace Church over what he called "the tongues issue," which he said "was not in line with the traditional Baptist position." The committee felt the practice of speaking in tongues at Grace would create disharmony as it had at Green Street.

Harrod went ahead to tell the newspaper that speaking in tongues "is a divisive kind of thing. It's disruptive."

"We don't want to have anything to do with this," he added. Despite the refusal

of the association to admit the church into membership, Grace Baptist Church gained membership in the North Carolina Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention—a position which is possible on a technicality. As long as the church makes even a token financial contribution to the convention's mission fund (called the Cooperative Fund), it is considered a member in good standing.

In actuality, however, Grace Baptist Church has all the aspects of a non-denominational church and very few of the people continue to attend Baptist functions—even though it gives a

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substantial amount of money to the cooperative program of the SBC.

The association's dire prediction that tongues would create disharmony at Grace Church proved to be false prophecy. In fact, in the church's five-year history, there has been little disharmony of any kind—and none of it has centered around tongues. Price likes to recall that his wife's uncle, the late Ralph Herring who was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem for 25 years, encouraged him to have a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Of course, Herring had no idea what that might lead to, or that his niece and her husband would one day confess that their prayer life includes constant conversations with God in tongues.

Price is quick to point out that the gifts of the Spirit are not the primary thrust of the church. "We are open to the flow of the Spirit," he says. "We want the gifts to have their rightful place. But we seek to magnify God the Father, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the rightful place of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We try not to center on any one thing."

The steering committee continued to function as an "official board" until early 1981. At that time they appointed a study group to consider drawing up a constitution and by-laws. The new by-laws reflected the prophetic direction which had been given that night at the Wilson home—that the church should be governed by elders under Price's spiritual oversight. The by-laws were submitted to the congregation who, in their customary enthusiastic manner, voted to relinquish all authority into the hands of the elders.

The steering committee, having finished its task, resigned. Dr. Kent Bennett, Cecil Wilson, Jim Nelson and Buddy Price were recognized as elders. Later Dr. Alton Reeder was also appointed an elder.

About this same time Grace Church entered a new and exciting phase of ministry. The High Point YMCA vacated their old four-story building in the heart of town to move into new quarters in the suburbs. Shortly after Grace Church received permission to take over the old building on a year-by-year lease arrangement. It was the beginning of a new ministry and the fulfillment of a dream held by many in the church.

For more than a year the church (now grown to almost 700 members) had been actively supporting a street and prison ministry known as "The Lion and the Lamb." Working out of a downtown coffee house, director Ken Helser, a gifted evangelist, musician and artist, had sub-

mitted his ministry to a board made up primarily of Grace members. Richard Price, a successful real estate agent, had left his business to join Helser as his manager. The ministry of "The Lion and The Lamb" rapidly expanded and soon Helser and the troupe traveling with him—all from Grace Church—were ministering in prisons and to youth groups all across the southeast.

(Later this ministry expanded to include a half-way house for ex-prisoners which centers around a furniture sales and repair business called "The Carpenter's Shop.")

The coffee house, which had daily activities aimed at the youth of the city—including large Saturday night concerts—gave the believers at Grace the opportunity to minister among the street people. However, it was not until the church acquired use of the old downtown YMCA that the opportunity for personal ministry became a reality.

The top floor of the YMCA contained dormitory and bedrooms. Shortly after moving in, the church opened the top floor to provide sleeping facilities for the drug addicts, alcoholics and poor street people who often huddled in the alleys and slum areas of downtown High Point. Each night between 30 and 50 men and women of all ages would line up in front of the "church building" waiting for a place to sleep.

"I never dreamed we had so many homeless people in our wealthy little town," Bennett told me. "Can you imagine 40 starving, shivering addicts and alcoholics a night 'coming to church'?"

Bennett, along with the other elders and staff members—as well as a large number of church members—take turns sleeping on the floor in the big dorm rooms, overseeing the ministry to street people.

"It's ironic," one cultured, southern lady told me after spending the night sleeping on a mat in the girl's dorm. "Five years ago I was one of the most vocal members of our former church, insisting we relocate in a more 'acceptable' section of town so we wouldn't be overrun by bums, prostitutes and winos. Now the Holy Spirit has me actually inviting them into our church every night so we can minister to them. Isn't it wonderful!!"



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