



Here & Now

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An update for Florida Baptist Historical Society Board of Directors and Friends

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Dear Board Members and Friends of the Florida Baptist Historical Society,

I miss "M" night. In my home church our pastor always pushed "M" night. We did not have a church van or bus but the Sunday before you could sign up to go, and various families in the church would then volunteer to transport those families who did not own a car. We would go to the largest church in the association on the first Monday night in December and hear great music, good preaching and Training Union promotion for the following year. Speakers were always from out of town, well known and attendance was sky high. Our church never got the "banner." Every church name was called in alphabetical order and members from that church stood and were counted. The church with the largest percentage of Training Union members present got the attendance "banner" for that year. It was a coveted award.

In 1919, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board set up the B.Y.P.U. Department with L. P. Leavell, as part-time secretary. This eventually became Training Union, and then Discipleship Training. From the beginning the goal was to contribute to individual spiritual growth through Bible study, and exposure to church history, ethics and leadership.

The SBC *Quarterly Review* (July-Sept, 1990, p. 71) reports "Church Training" enrollment beginning in 1911. The 1911 enrollment was 60,7000. In 1924, the enrollment reached 546,193. It was in 1948, that the Church Training enrollment reached one million (1,079,024) and in 1954, the enrollment reached 2,062,954 (Remember "A Million More in '54?"). The highest Church Training enrollment on record is 2,748,553 in 1963.

Out of this spiritual growth enthusiasm came an emphasis upon annual mass meetings. The Southern Baptist Convention promoted a "Centennial Program" in 1945, that celebrated the first 100 years of the convention. At the time there were 907 Southern Baptist associations in the SBC and each association was encouraged to have their mass meeting on the night of April 24, 1945. This was done, and in Florida, we had 34 out of our 35 associations to meet with 5,970 Baptists in attendance. This successful mass meeting effort developed into the "Southern Baptist Association Training Union Day" meeting of December 6, 1946.



Jerry Lambdin

Training Union leadership decided to call the first Monday night meeting "Mobilization Night" or "M Night." The meeting attendance in 1946, was 75,964 and ten years later in 1956, it was 438,609. Baptists looked forward to "M" night, winning the "Banner," good music and a good speaker. States, associations and churches set "M Night" goals for attendance and participation. Jerry Lambdin served as director of SBC Church Training from 1929-1959.

"M Night" had four main goals: enlarge Church Training enrollment, start new Church Training groups, magnify the Sword Drill and Speaker's Tournament, and launch the Training Union program for the new year. These goals led in hitting a two million Church Training enrollment in 1954.

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Florida was vitally involved in this. In 1940, the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported the largest Training Union attendance in the state was Main Street, Jacksonville (387); Central, Miami (348); First, St. Petersburg (214); First, Orlando and First, Tallahassee (194); Riverside, Miami (193); First, Pensacola (186); and First, Gainesville (182).

In 1958, O.K. Radford was Church Training secretary in Florida and he reported "Mobilization Night" meant Baptists were to "assemble and make ready." All 44 Florida Baptist associations set their "M Night" for Monday, December 1, (*FBW*, Nov. 20, 1958, p. 16).



Grady Nutt

In 1960, Florida Baptists set a goal of 27,000 to attend their Monday, December 5, "M Night" meeting. Jacksonville and Miami set a goal of 2,000 in attendance, and Pensacola Bay Association set a goal of 2,200. Every association in the Southern Baptist Convention had the same "M Night" theme and program. The 1960 "M Night" was to lay plans, programs and goals for 1961, with the theme of "Be Thou Faithful." (*FBW*, December 1, 1960, p. 11).

"M Night" speakers in Florida proved to be a listing of spiritual delight. Denominational leaders, professors, pastors and Baptist celebrities made the annual program a special event. Some associational examples might be of interest. In 1965, John Maguire, James Southerland, Carl Bates, C.A. Roberts, J.D. Grey, Warren Hultgren, J. Hardee Kennedy, Adrian Rogers and Jess Moody were featured speakers. In 1970, Harold Bennett and James Pleitz were well known speakers, and First, DeLand had out of stater R.G. Lee to speak. In 1975, Landum Leavell, Grady Cothan and Franklin Paschall were out of state speakers

and Florida Church Training leader Bill Carmichael spoke at First, Winter Haven and at Fellowship in Tallahassee. Robert Cook and Gary Nichols were also Church Training leaders that led in "M Night" meetings. Two of the best known speakers were Grady Nutt ("Hee Haw" fame) who spoke at First, Fort Lauderdale in 1970, and Bobby Bowden who spoke at DeLand Baptist Church in 1980.



Bobby Bowden

After 50 years of consistent meetings, (1945-1995), "M Night" gave way to "Discipleship Rallies" in 1996. Florida Baptists had 32 associations to gather with 3,666 persons in attendance (1996, *Florida Baptist Annual*, p. 99). These rallies promoted Bible drills, leadership projects and training programs in the state. The 1996 meeting closed out 50 years of Baptist getting together the first Monday night in December, to promote discipleship, training and service.

I will have to admit it. I still miss "M Night."

Honoring those who honor Christ,

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 Matthew 6:33
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