

Susan Smith's

Review of

Interfaith Mission Service

History

1976 - 1980

Interfaith Mission Service in 1976: Susan Smith's Review of Our History

The year is 1976, the 200th birthday year of the United States. The lander of the Viking II spacecraft touches down on Mars. The price of oil continues to rise, and the unrest in Lebanon convinces the US to evacuate most American dependents from the country. In his last years as President, Richard Nixon had appointed several new members of the US Supreme Court, and in 1976 the Justices declare capital punishment to be constitutional, overturning a ruling made by the same court just four years earlier. Federal spending for social service programs is declining after peaking in the late '60's and early '70's. In November, in a narrow victory over incumbent President Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter is elected President of the United States, bringing the Habitat for Humanity program into the public eye.

1976 was an active political year in Madison County as well. Fifth District Congressman Bob Jones decided to retire after a long career in the US House of Representatives, so a large group of candidates competed for the position that was eventually won by Ronnie Flipppo. IMS, the League of Women Voters, Church Women United and Common Cause jointly sponsored a well-attended Candidates' Night in April for congressional candidates and another in August for candidates for Mayor, City Council and the School Board. Both of the latter groups were still elected city-wide, rather than by districts, so voters needed to be familiar with the positions of a large number of candidates to decide which five would receive their votes. Before each Candidates' Night, the IMS Bridge attempted to inform readers about current issues so they could ask pertinent questions.

IMS continued to provide partial funding for the Huntsville Emergency Line Program (HELP), Huntsville Interfaith Volunteer Transportation Service (HIVTS), the Counseling and Growth Center, the Food Pantries, Jail Ministries and the Agora coffeehouse for young adults. Following a goal-setting session early in the year, IMS priorities were determined to be (1) concerns of minority groups [especially Blacks and women], (2) establishing new direct-service programs, (3) political education and training, (4) providing funding and recruiting volunteers for the related projects, and (5) providing training for congregations on social issues. Task forces were established around each of these issues, with specific objectives and action plans for each. It was also decided to make the IMS office an "information and documentation center" to which congregations could refer when learning about social service ministries and other issues. Much of the research on public policy issues was done by Frank Broyles, who left mid-year to enroll in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. Similar work was then done by John Haley, who also organized seminars in various cities, including Huntsville, on the Alabama legislative process.

The IMS budget in 1976 called for expenditures of \$41,000, of which \$21,000 was funding for the related projects. Funding for IMS and its related programs reached a critical point several times during 1976, with salaries and some bills being paid late. A fashion show at the Von Braun Civic Center, with fashions provided by Parisian and modeled by members of IMS congregations, helped IMS and its related projects offset their deficit budgets. Amidst this pressure to keep the organization viable, the IMS board scheduled a picnic in August for "the socialization of the whole family of IMS" and announced that the discussion of IMS business was taboo.

The IMS Executive Committee faced with this challenge consisted of Pauline Precise, Robert Hamilton, Hank Beall and Virginia Lavender. Since IMS was organized on a task force structural plan, rather than standing committees, chairpersons of the task forces were not considered members of the Executive Committee. However, by the end of the year, the decision was made to return to a committee structure.

Mid-1976 the IMS Council asked Director Jim Tuohy to assume the responsibilities of editor of The Bridge, since information-sharing was determined to be a major part of the organization's mission. The newsletter had not been published during the last three months of 1975 for lack of money, and again in May 1976 the decision was made not to publish The Bridge again that year unless churches donated the paper for printing. Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Covenant Presbyterian Church and two individuals provided the needed financial support, so a total of ten issues were produced, focusing on topics ranging from the separation of church and state to capital punishment. The August-September issue of The Bridge also listed the memberships of the twelve City boards appointed by the Mayor or City Council. It noted that, of the 69 individuals filling 75 board positions, only 3 were women and none were Blacks.

As the rising cost of petroleum caused the cost of living to climb, the need grew for emergency funds to help city residents pay for rent, utilities and similar needs. IMS encouraged member congregations to establish their own discretionary funds to help meet individual needs. Christmas Charities expressed a willingness to coordinate the disbursement of such funds if congregations wished to work through them.

Adequate housing for low-income residents was a concern addressed in an IMS-sponsored seminar in May. There was already an inadequate amount of such housing, and the planned demolition of the Binford Court public housing development and the planned construction of I-565 was certain to make the situation even more critical. Participants at the seminar proposed and the IMS Council adopted resolutions calling for better police protection in public housing developments and for the Mayor to appoint at least one representative of public housing tenants to the Housing Authority Board.

IMS participated in Alabama IMPACT, an organization which monitored strip mining, mental health issues and criminal justice in the state. In fact, prison reform was the focus of significant IMS energy. Overcrowding, inadequate food and other similar conditions at the four state prisons (all in the southern part of the state) prompted Federal Judge Frank Johnson to declare the Alabama prison system to be in violation of the Eighth Amendment and therefore unconstitutional. Because Judge Johnson's order prohibited sending any new prisoners to the state prison, county jails around the state quickly became overcrowded as well. IMS took an official position urging the Alabama Board of Corrections to build regional correctional facilities, rather than add to the four existing prisons, so prisoners could maintain some contact with the families to which they would eventually return.

The IMS Annual Dinner was held in September at Holy Spirit Catholic Church, with Bishop Joseph Vath of the Catholic Diocese of Birmingham speaking on "Criminal Justice". This year's event was a covered-dish dinner, so tickets were just \$1 each. Accordion music by IMS Director Jim Tuohy was planned to "loosen up" the evening's participants. The current IMS Director is certainly glad that such expectations are not a part of her job description!

IMS Logo in 1976



Interfaith Mission Service in 1977 — Susan Smith's Review of Our History

The year is 1977. The American Bicentennial is past. Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale, recently elected as President and Vice President, are facing the challenges of inflation, energy shortages, welfare reform and human rights here and abroad.

Interfaith Mission Service, with Jim Tuohy as Director and Bridge editor, continues to occupy office space in the Cavalry Hills Neighborhood Center on Fairbanks Avenue. On its brochures, IMS describes itself as "a coalition of the religious community united for training and service". With a membership of 33 congregations -- Protestant, Catholic and Jewish -- IMS invites into membership any congregation which wishes to "apply Judeo-Christian principles to urban ministry". Eight congregations and three judicatories together provided \$33,500 of the \$49,600 budget for the year.

IMS files for 1977 and the following years are largely missing, so a picture of those years is pieced together with some difficulty, primarily from issues of The Bridge.

Officers installed at the January 1977 Council meeting were Bob Hamilton (Chair), Aaron Smith (Vice Chair), Frankie Johnson (Secretary), Mona Hagyard (Treasurer), Virginia Lavender (At-large) and Daryl Canfill, Charles Betts and M.D. Clark (Clergy Members At-large). It had been decided in late 1976 to reinstate committee chairs as members of the board, so Neal Roberts (New Ministries) and Chuck Vedane (Fundraising) shared the responsibility of steering an organization committed to:

1. impressing upon all that social concerns emanate from religious concerns;
2. representing the affiliated congregations in areas of service to the community; and
3. carrying out programs which promote interfaith understanding.

Goals for the year included:

1. **Recruiting foster parents** among congregation members. At least three families added their names to the Department of Pensions and Securities' roster as the result of IMS efforts.
2. **Encouraging congregations to take a position about reinstatement of the death penalty**, which had not been utilized in Alabama for 10 years.
3. **Urging broader representation on city boards and commissions.** Mayor Joe Davis did appoint a Black individual, Dr. Leander Patton, to the Housing Authority Board, but his appointment was considered by some to be "tokenism" since he was neither a resident of public housing nor chosen by residents to represent them.
4. **Making The Bridge self-sustaining.** Congregations were asked to "sponsor" an issue by providing the \$50 needed to produce and mail 700 issues.
5. **Developing an individual membership classification and a corps of volunteer workers** to carry out the programs of IMS.

IMS continued to provide partial funding for several "ministries":

- * **Huntsville Interfaith Volunteer Transportation Service**, which provided some 1400 trips per month for individuals referred by the Department of Pensions and Securities or another social service agency;
- * **Huntsville Emergency Line Program**, through which some 115 volunteers were answering over 1000 calls per month;
- * **Jail Ministries**, providing tutoring and mentors for the Work Release program;
- * **Agora**, where 30-50 young people found fellowship four nights a week, with attendance swelling to 100 on evenings with live entertainment; and
- * **Emergency Food and Financial Aid**, coordinated by IMS and Christmas Charities, which combined the resources of several IMS congregations to provide rent, utilities, food and transportation assistance for 180 clients in 1977.

Funding and "people power" were constant challenges. A Walk-A-Thon and some special funding from the Southeastern Lutheran Synod were necessary in order for IMS to meet its financial commitments to these ministries. Despite being well attended, Agora nearly closed in May for the lack of adult volunteer managers. The Administration Committee was charged with the task of establishing a corps of volunteers to help carry out programs which embodied the IMS mission.

Different issues of The Bridge focused on topics ranging from hunger and health care to prison reform, human rights and peacemaking (a controversial topic in a city whose economy was so closely tied to missile research and development). The March issue reported the results of an IMS survey of the residents of Binford Court, a public housing development for which the Huntsville Housing Authority had announced demolition plans.

Frank Broyles, who had left a volunteer position at IMS in 1976 to attend Vanderbilt Divinity School, returned in October 1977 to work eight hours a week in urban ministry as part of his seminary training. He, Jim Tuohy and Pauline Precise made presentations on hunger to Sunday School classes in at least three IMS congregations. An IMS seminar on that topic was held in May, at which resolutions were adopted and sent to Congressman Ronnie Flippo and Senators James Allen and John Sparkman asking them to vote for the establishment of the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program and for the elimination of the requirement that Food Stamp recipients purchase their stamps with cash. Following the seminar, volunteers from IMS and Church Women United started going door-to-door to enroll families in the Food Stamp program, since it was estimated that only 40% of the eligible families were participating.

Some 75 supporters attended the IMS Annual Dinner, originally scheduled for Holy Spirit Catholic Church but held at Trinity Methodist Church on September 15. The event was a

covered-dish dinner, so ticket cost was only \$1.50 per person. Following entertainment by members of the Huntsville Community Chorus, Dr. Don Armentrout, a professor at the University of the South, spoke on urban ministry, basing his remarks on the late Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech.

In 1977, as now, with other organizations and alone, through seminars and workshops, publications and calls-to-action, IMS worked to bring the spiritual and ethical concerns of the religious community to a broad range of social needs. The challenge continues!

Interfaith Mission Service in 1978 -- Susan Smith's Review of Our History

1978 was a tumultuous year for IMS. While orientation sessions for Congregational Representatives and quarterly meetings with clergy strengthened the bonds between IMS and its member congregations, a series of unrelated events delivered a strong punch to the leadership. In July, changes in his job responsibilities required IMS President Bob Hamilton to step down, while out-of-town moves claimed Council Secretary Frankie Johnson and Treasurer Mona Hagyard. These departures were followed in August by the resignation of IMS Director Jim Tuohy, who accepted a position with the Community Action Agency of Huntsville-Madison County. So Chuck Vedane, who became IMS President, and Edith Richards (part-time office manager) were left to steer the organization for the remainder of the year. Frank Broyles, a seminary student at Vanderbilt, also contracted to work a maximum of 12 hours per week, editing The Bridge and organizing many of the other IMS activities.

By 1978, Huntsville's population was approximately 143,000, having almost doubled since 1960. While most of the community was enjoying the booming economy, the unskilled "hard core" poor were unable to reap the benefits. Because of the tremendous demand for housing for newly arrived engineers and support workers, the shortage of housing for the poor approached a critical level. So housing was an issue that continued to receive the attention of IMS and its 36 Christian and Jewish congregations. Following a study which showed widespread deterioration in the buildings at Binford Court housing development, IMS organized a protest against the proposed rent increases of 12-19%. Finally realizing that the structures were beyond repair, the Huntsville Housing Authority began closing units as they were vacated, though some 700 families were on the waiting list for subsidized housing.

In May, IMS began surveying area agencies for a study of hunger in North Alabama, funded by a \$4400 grant from the national Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. A three-part IMS presentation on hunger was also given to Sunday School classes at Church of the Nativity, St. Mark's Lutheran and University, Holmes Street and Valley United Methodist churches.

The February/March issue of The Bridge announced the establishment of the Institute for Public Life, "designed to be a research, training and educational center that assesses societal needs from a theological and humanistic perspective." Research, particularly that done by Frank Broyles on behalf of the Institute, formed the basis of many of IMS' social actions during 1978 and succeeding years. Membership fees ranged from \$5 for an individual to \$50 for a patron.

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In May 1978 Jim Tuohy and Frank Broyles conducted a well-attended Skills Training Workshop in Urban Ministry for members of Social Action Committees in IMS congregations, while Tuohy occasionally spoke to groups within various congregations on topics ranging from Alabama's Prisons to Low Income Housing. In the fall, clusters of congregations were asked to send members to listening sessions to provide input to IMS' Operating Plan for the coming year.

IMS continued to recruit support for the Alabama Volunteers in Corrections (formerly the Jail Ministry) and the inmates' Work Release program. Overcrowding in the county jail was magnified when the Alabama Law Enforcement Planning Agency ceased funding for the Work Release program, causing it to be staffed entirely by volunteers, who lacked an established office.

IMS' Education and Training Committee organized a series of three Candidates' Nights before the September 1978 primaries for local, state and congressional offices. After soliciting ideas for issues to be presented, committee members researched and prepared background papers on each topic, which were then sent to IMS congregations before the Candidates' Nights.

As in past years, each issue of The Bridge focused on a different topic. The February/March issue contained articles from various sources on nuclear power, a topic which would come before the United Nations in mid-1979. With its nuclear power plants and army and space programs, North Alabama had a special interest in this topic. Other issues presented information on senior citizens, the judicial/prison system, and race relations.

The Bridge also carried monthly reports from the IMS projects, which together received \$19,000 of a budget totalling \$45,000. The Care Assurance System for the Aging (CASA) was organized in October 1978, sharing the office on Fairbanks Avenue with IMS. Agora, the coffeehouse on Jordan Lane, continued to enjoy strong patronage, especially on "open mike" nights and evenings with live entertainment. With a cut in federal funding and a shortage of volunteer drivers, the Huntsville Interfaith Volunteer Transportation Service (HIVTS) was unable to meet some of their requests for services.

Two events in the fall of 1978 kept IMS' momentum going despite Director Jim Tuohy's departure. The Annual Dinner in September at Trinity United Methodist Church featured a filmstrip presentation on Welfare Reform, a topic expected to be debated by the US Congress again the following year. The band Rock of Ages got the

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evening off to a relaxed start before the covered-dish supper. In October, an event dubbed "March for Missions" took walkers on a five-mile walk from Fern Bell Park on Whitesburg Drive to Madkin Mountain on Redstone Arsenal and back. With lunch being served at the mid-way point, the all-day event raised some \$3100 for IMS-funded projects.

In 1978 Jimmy Carter was in the second year of his presidency, during which he sponsored peace talks between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Premier Menahem Begin. With unemployment low but inflation high, much of the American population was uncertain whether to be optimistic or pessimistic about the future. George Wallace was in his third term as Governor of Alabama, while Howell Heflin was elected US Senator that November, just weeks after Pope John Paul II was elected by the College of Cardinals in Rome. Is it possible that all of that was really 20 years ago?! How time flies!

Interfaith Mission Service in 1979 and 1980 – Susan Smith's Review of Our History

Interfaith Mission Service has had some “rocky spots” in our historical “road”, and one long one certainly occurred in 1979 and 1980. Without the strong leadership of Executive Committee members such as Max Haskett, Jack Hunter, Ken Knowles, Barbara Lucero, Larry Maines, John Masterson, Toni Reynolds, Neal Roberts, Harold VanderVeen, Chuck Vedane and others, IMS would almost certainly have ceased to exist during these times.

Following IMS Director Jim Tuohy’s resignation in August 1978, much of the administrative responsibility fell upon office manager Edith Richards, with Executive Committee member Toni Reynolds volunteering 20-30 hours per week to “keep IMS on track and moving”. As he has several times before and since, Frank Broyles expanded his role as Research Assistant to fill in much of the gap during the 15 months that IMS was without a director. In the words of an Executive Committee member of that time, Frank was “instrumental and indispensable”.

Dr. James I. Harrison, III, became Executive Director in November of 1979, bringing a background as a Methodist minister and in business. In a letter introducing himself to the IMS member congregations, Harrison suggested that congregations consider him a member of their staffs and also invite him to preach, speak at dinners or sing baritone solos with their choirs. In June 1980, however, Harrison resigned as Executive Director, offering to work a maximum of 8 hours per week through August or until a new Director could be hired. Prior to Harrison’s hiring and again upon his resignation, the Executive Committee debated whether IMS’ finances would permit the employment of a full-time director, but each time they decided to proceed with such plans.

At their September 1980 meeting, the IMS Council approved the hiring of the Rev. Bob Loshuertos as IMS Executive Director, to begin at the end of the following month. As Pastor of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, an IMS congregation, Loshuertos was already familiar with IMS and the local community, so his time getting up to speed was minimized.

The IMS Journal was the main publication during this period, with each issue presenting five or six articles on national and local topics. Edited first by Frank Broyles and later by J.W. Connaughton, the Journal was published irregularly as “an attempt by the religious

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community to address the critical social issues of our community". The first issue in August 1979 included articles on "The Church's Role in Social Ministry", the hospice concept, the Madison County Jail and the history and current status of the Ku Klux Klan. In December, the second issue explained the SALT II treaty (whose ratification was before the US Senate), the new chaplaincy program at Huntsville Hospital and the emergency services being provided in south Alabama following Hurricane Frederick earlier in the Fall. A third issue in the Spring of 1980 included articles ranging from "The Iranian Mirror: Reflections of Ourselves" to "Gifted Children: Problems and Promise".

In late 1978, under a contract with the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG), the Care Assurance System for the Aging (CASA) was opened in the IMS office on Fairbanks Avenue. Primarily offering services to elderly individuals who had recently been discharged from the hospital, CASA had five part-time field representatives across north Alabama. The relationship between CASA and IMS was poorly defined, and the situation was further complicated while CASA had a director and IMS had none. Once Bob Loshuertos became IMS Director, the CASA Director's job description was rewritten to state that she "will look to the IMS Director to obtain direction concerning program content." When TARCOG announced in early 1980 that it would be forced to halve CASA's \$12,000 grant in the coming year, IMS Executive Committee members tried to help CASA Director Wanda McDonald (later Pat Hair) find other funding sources, but discussion was also begun of the feasibility of CASA becoming an independent agency.

In addition to CASA, IMS was actively involved in getting a hospice program started in Huntsville, providing the needed funding to train the initial corps of volunteers. Assistance was also given to Huntsville Hospital as they established the position of hospital chaplain. A series of "Education Awareness Programs" was made available to the churches, focusing on topics such as criminal justice, alcoholism and family issues. The first in a series of joint worship services was held at Trinity Methodist Church on a Sunday evening in March 1980. The service was based on the doctrine of creation, with the Huntsville Community Chorus singing portions of Hayden's "The Creation".

Support for the IMS ministries or projects was a priority for the Executive Committee, with over half of the annual budget dedicated to Agora, Family Services Center, HELPLine, Huntsville Interfaith Volunteer Transportation System (HIVTS), the Institute for Public Life and the emergency pantry system's telephone service. A study of

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the IMS projects done by Toni Reynolds in mid-1979 indicated that the Agora coffee house was no longer “publicly relating to IMS in policy or principles”, so discussion began about ending financial support of one of IMS’ oldest ministries. Despite perennially precarious finances, in 1980 IMS committed to paying for HELPLine’s new telephone equipment if HELPLine were unable to do so. Meanwhile, IMS wielded what influence it could to convince the City Council to provide some funding to HELPLine beginning in May 1980.

During 1979 and 1980, IMS’ priorities and policies were established by an Executive Committee and the IMS Council. The Council was composed of representatives of the 30+ member congregations and met monthly (usually at St. Mark’s Lutheran or Trinity Methodist Church). Council meetings began with a program on timely topics such as “How to Host the Boat People” and “The Moral Majority”, with the business meeting following. The Executive Committee was larger than the IMS Boards of earlier and later years, with officers, committee chairs and several at-large members. Discussion surfaced frequently about changing this organizational structure back to a board system, but no such action was initiated. In fact, because so much effort had been focused on the search for a new Executive Director, the 1980 officers remained in their positions for three months beyond the end of their terms to permit a smooth transition for Bob Loshuertos.

The IMS budgets of 1979 and 1980 show a significant financial commitment to the organization’s mission. Despite the fact that many local churches were constructing buildings to accommodate the area’s rapid population growth, most member congregations pledged financial support and met their commitments. But a large portion of the budgeted income was expected to come from fundraising and donations, and it was here that the shortfall generally occurred. Despite a candy sale (net \$1100), city-wide newspaper collection (\$350) and the first annual Auction and Rummage Sale (\$3500), the 1980 financial statements show less than \$8000 of a hoped-for \$20,500 income from these sources. In the face of this uncertainty, it took a giant “leap of faith” for the 1980 Executive Committee and Council to commit to a full-time Executive Director and decide that, even if IMS had to borrow money from the bank to ease cash-flow problems, salaries would be paid on time.

In 1998, we are grateful to those people of faith, courage and determination who steered IMS through difficult times to continue to serve our community. May we show the same faith, courage and determination to take IMS further still!

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