

History
OF
The Presbyterian Church
IN
South Carolina
Since 1850



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THE SYNOD AND HOME MISSIONS

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The work of Home Missions did not become a Synodical interest until 1896. The Presbyteries had ever been jealous of their jurisdiction. At one time, it is true, the Assembly had been allowed to take over the work, but never had the Synod. In fact the Synod, with many, was considered more of the nature of a fifth wheel in the Presbyterian machine. That the Synod should not be charged with any interest other than the review of the activities of the Presbyteries and the conduct of the Theological Seminary was the settled policy. When this writer first became a member of the Synod he recalls being asked if he was going to Synod, as if such attendance was an optional matter. When he in turn asked "What do you do at Synod?" the reply he got was, "Oh, we meet the brethren and discuss the Seminary."

When it was first suggested that the Synod might help out by taking a hand in Home Missions two objections were raised. First, the Synod had no territory of its own, "every foot of ground being occupied by some Presbytery." Second, for the Synod to attempt anything would be "to create conflict of authority." This was said when the three Presbyteries in the lower part of the Synod could not overtake their destitution and one of them was actually losing ground while the upper tier of Presbyteries was relatively strong in numbers and resources.

Thus two ideas had to try their strength and one or the other had to win out before anything could be done. The one was, that the cause of Presbyterianism in the Synod was the affair of every Presbyterian in the Synod. The other was, we had a most excellent form of government, and the preservation of it was the major consideration of all.

These two ideas made the action of the Synod in 1896 a compromise measure. The Synod in that action but offered its services to such Presbyteries as would accept its help and do only what it was permitted to do. The next year's report

revealed that four out of the six Presbyteries had let the Synod in for "Evangelistic Work." One of the neediest and one of the strongest declined to cooperate even in this. The committee appointed by Synod said in its report, "We appointed members of the committee to appear before the Presbyteries and solicit their cooperation and we were careful to respect the rights not only of those which could not see their way clear to cooperate but also of those which did decide to do so." "While we realize that the work of Home Missions in South Carolina belongs to all the Presbyterians in the State, yet at the same time, we realize that we are living under a 'Form of Government' that is dear to all of us."

The Rev. N. J. Holmes was elected the first Evangelist under the arrangement and his duty was made to present the cause to our churches and solicit contributions from the people to get something to start with. He, like Philip of old, though charged with the business side of the proposition, nevertheless preached the Word also. He visited 64 churches in ten months and raised \$4,841.58 for the cause. He conducted several evangelistic meetings also, as a partial result of which "70 persons made public professions of faith in Christ." He also worked up a petition of eight persons for a church in Georgetown. The church was organized by Harmony Presbytery in that year "the first Presbyterian Church which ever existed in Georgetown County."

The Committee also employed Rev. W. L. Boggs for work in Enoree Presytery and Rev. J. A. Wilson for work in Pee Dee Presbytery as the funds came in. In three months, Mr. Boggs succeeded in organizing one church, resuscitating one and in establishing two mission stations. Mr. Wilson conducted six evangelistic meetings, received 14 persons into the church on profession and 10 by letter, ordained two Elders in a mission church and established two missions which soon grew into churches and besides collected some \$473.00 for church buildings at these points. It was thus the Synod began its work. Rev. W. G. Neville was the wise and courteous chairman of the Committee that piloted this beginning. He said in his report "Your Committee feels that this work should be continued for another year. We have felt greatly encouraged.

The people are very much interested in the cause and we now place it upon the heart and conscience of the Synod”.

The next year saw a curtailment. The Rev. N. J. Holmes after only two months of faithful service had to be released for lack of funds. The cry of hard times made itself heard. Mr. Boggs continued his labors in Enoree for ten and one-half months and his services had to be dispensed with. He during that time was instrumental in organizing two churches and in reviving two. He had conducted eight protracted meetings, received 32 persons into the church on profession, formed three pastoral groups and secured pastors for the same. He had preached about 150 times and paid some 400 visits in interest of the work. Mr. Wilson had continued his work in Pee Dee with headquarters in Horry County. He kept up five preaching points in that county and one in Marion. This good brother was never happy unless he had at least five churches to look after. He assisted in raising funds for five church buildings, two in Marion and three in Horry. Three of these are self-supporting churches today.

During this year, Rev. J. E. Dunlop was placed in charge of the work in Georgetown in connection with Union and Kings-tree churches in Williamsburg. In Georgetown he preached in a hall not able to accommodate comfortably all who wished to attend. The little band was forced to undertake to build, they had little money, and the Committee of Synod could only help with \$200.00. The erection of that church building makes a long story of struggle and hardship. It was begun in 1900 to cost \$2,400.00, with but \$1,600.00 on hand. It stood for more than a year incomplete but by 1902 it was occupied. In a terrific storm on the 17th of September, 1906, this church building that had cost such effort was so badly wrecked that a new building became a necessity, the building of which furnishes another chapter in this story.

By 1900 the chairmanship of the Committee had passed from Rev. W. G. Neville to Rev. Alexander Sprunt, Dr. Neville having been called to other important work in the Synod. In his passing from official connection with this work, Home Missions lost one of the most tactful hands and one of the sweetest spirits that ever served the Synod in any capacity. He was

essentially a pioneer and the Synod had other pioneer work for him to do. He really gave his life in sacrifice to lay upon the heart and conscience of his Synod the work of Christian Education.

Dr. Sprunt set to work to bring the facts before the mind of the Synod by having published a special issue of the Southern Presbyterian containing, among other things, a map that made the facts appeal to the eye. He visited the non-cooperating Presbyteries and succeeded in inducing them to come in "but with reservations" and in his report to Synod rejoiced "that we are now an undivided Synod on this subject." He rejoiced too soon, as we shall see. The wish with him was father to the thought. At this time three local evangelists were employed. The three James—Wilson, Dunlop and Russell, and Rev. B. P. Reid was employed as general manager. His special duties were pioneering and soliciting financial support. In January of this year, Rev. R. P. Walker was made a pastoral evangelist in Charleston Presbytery, and in June, the Rev. Kenneth McCaskill was also put into that Presbytery in the same capacity. Walker labored in Hampton and Barnwell counties. His labor being in the churches of Estill and Allendale and the maintenance of the churches at Crockettville, Barnwell, Boiling Spring, and Beech Island. McCaskill gave his attention to Bamberg, Denmark, Blackville, and Langley.

Rev. J. A. Wilson gave three months of his time to five appointments in Horry and nine months to nine appointments in Marion. He literally wore himself out in the care of the churches, going from place to place on a bicycle collecting funds for church buildings and visiting in the homes of the people. No man has done more hard, self-denying work than he. With this year his name drops from the list, he having the satisfaction of seeing the work of the Lord prosper in his hands.

The Rev. James Russell was in Pee Dee, Harmony and Enoree, visiting discouraged congregations and holding meetings.

The next year the force continued the same with the exception of the substitution of Rev. C. E. Robinson for J. A. Wilson in Pee Dee Presbytery. A church at Bayboro was organized with 22 members. The Committee had to come to Synod with

a debt of \$308. The Rev. B. P. Reid severed his connection at this time, and the Committee decided to take on no aggressive work. The four fields, two in Charleston, and one each in Harmony and Pee Dee Presbyteries were manned as before and the work became more of the nature of sustentation. The sum of \$5,000.00 was being asked for, and the churches were giving about \$3,000.00. The new feature added in 1903 was the effort to begin a work among the cotton mill operatives. The Rev. W. H. Mills was stationed in what is known as the Horse Creek Valley in Aiken County, Charleston Presbytery. In the four towns there was a population of 7,000, about one in eight being member of some church. There were just 27 Presbyterians to be found. Mr. Mills continued in this work until September of 1906 without being able to accomplish more than to discover the needs of the work and reveal to the Synod the conditions that have to be met in such work.

At the Synod in Cheraw, 1903, it was felt that something more must be done. Dr. Sprunt was highly commended for his untiring zeal and devotion to this work under great difficulties. The Synod elected Rev. F. H. Wardlaw Superintendent and Rev. R. G. McLees general evangelist. The monetary situation was so unpromising that a draft was made upon faith. The salary of these two young men was put at \$50 per month each and their traveling expenses. The hope was held out to them that if the financial results justified it, their salaries would be \$1,000 per annum each. They accepted the work after some months' consideration. "All the Presbyteries were again entreated to cooperate and thus rally to the aid of the Synod in its efforts to overtake the spiritual destitution in all parts of our beloved State and to raise the sum of \$5,000 for this purpose."

By 1905, Dr. Sprunt had severed his connection with the work, and F. H. Wardlaw was the chairman of the Committee. Rev. C. E. Robinson had left the Horry field in August of this year. Wm. J. Wyly had succeeded Mr. Dunlop at Georgetown. The work in the two fields in Charleston Presbytery was turned over to the Presbytery. The Committee reported, however, that seven houses of worship had been built, two churches organized and about 300 added to the membership of the

churches on profession through the Evangelistic agency. Forty churches had been aided to secure preaching. The Superintendent had begun the publication of *The Synod's Home Missionary*, a small monthly publication and at no cost to the work. He assisted the Evangelist in twenty of the meetings held, by leading the singing. He visited forty-six churches in the interest of the work. During this year, \$4,408 was contributed, being an increase of \$1,206 over the previous year. The Synod felt justified in the new step it had taken at Cheraw and declared "it to be its settled policy to maintain this agency," and to ask the churches for \$7,000 for the next year. The next year saw the same program being carried out with the same agents. Three hundred and fifty members had been added to the twenty-five churches in which the Evangelist had held meetings and a slight increase in the financial support. The one new feature was the second attempt to inaugurate a work among the cotton mill operatives. This was in the mills in and around Spartanburg with Rev. J. P. Stevenson in charge. The Rev. A. S. Doak had come in from Tennessee to the Horry field in Pee Dee Presbytery. During the next year there was an apparent retrogression. Rev. R. G. McLees continued his faithful preaching as evangelist, but his appointments being with the smaller congregations the apparent results were not so good as in former years. However, one hundred and eighty-three persons were added on profession. Rev. F. H. Wardlaw continued his faithful efforts as Superintendent but asked the Synod to release him at the end of the year that he might enter the Foreign Mission Service of the Church. The Synod went on record by special resolution in regretting to give up Mr. Wardlaw. There was a feeling of disappointment prevailing in the Synod at this time, and it was the meeting of the Synod at which the memorial of W. G. Neville, the pioneer of this work, was read.

A Committee was raised, of which G. G. Mayes became the Chairman and Treasurer, to continue such work as they could. At the same time, a special committee consisting of E. E. Gillespie, G. G. Mayes, and A. H. McArn was appointed to perfect a plan or reorganization that had been presented by Mr. Mayes and report to the next meeting of Synod. The Rev.

R. G. McLees was reelected Evangelist but the committee, after three months' service, released him for work in Florida and Oklahoma.

At the meeting of the Synod in Sumter, 1908, the Special Committee on Reorganization that had been appointed the year before, made its report. The report embodied a radical reorganization and forced a decision of several issues. The salient features of the plan as proposed are these: (1) Unity of Organization; the agencies of the Presbyteries and the Synod become one. (2) Presbyterial control; the Presbyteries to be put in absolute control of all the work and agents within their respective bounds. (3) Presbyterial cooperation through a Synod's committee, composed of the chairmen of the Presbyterial Committees and the placing of two-fifths of the funds contributed in its hands. An agency was created whereby the stronger Presbyteries could assist the weaker ones and general supervision and an evangelist could be had for all the Presbyteries. The report was earnestly debated and was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

The same committee was continued with R. G. McLees as their Evangelist until the new committee raised by the action of Synod could take charge. During the next year, fifty-five evangelistic meetings were held, thirty-eight churches were aided, three churches were organized, fourteen mission stations were maintained, and the sum of \$8,970.39 was expended in the combined work of the Synod.

The Committee's report said, "We also report that the new plan of work adopted at the last meeting of Synod has been agreed to by five of the Presbyteries, and we are assured that the other one will take similar action at its next meeting. The new plan, therefore, goes into operation from this time on. We recommend that a Superintendent and General Evangelist, as provided for, be elected at this time."

The Rev. R. G. McLees had asked to be relieved from further service as evangelist that he might enter the pastorate. In parting with him, the Synod lost an Evangelist of rare gifts. He could hold the attention of the old and the young alike. Years afterwards, as the writer has traveled the Synod, he has heard echoes of "The McLees Meetings." What Wardlaw and

McLees did for the cause of Christ and Presbyterianism can never be put in figures.

The Synod at their meeting in Charleston elected Rev. G. G. Mayes Superintendent and a minister of another Synod General Evangelist, provided the committee could procure a salary for him. The next year saw a great impetus given the cause. Mr. Mayes entered upon his duties on the 1st of January, 1910, after having set forth to the Committee in printed form what he conceived his work to be. Rev. E. E. Gillespie became the Chairman and Treasurer of the Committee. "Owing to the condition of the treasury, the Committee did not supply an Evangelist. The new plan of work has met with universal favor. The hearty cooperation of all the Presbyteries has meant success during the year just closed. There has been an average increase of over one hundred per cent in the apportionments made," to quote the report to Synod. The increase in contributions was something over \$1,000.00 and for the first time in years a balance on hand was reported. The Superintendent in the full report made revealed that he had devoted his time and energies to gathering information and giving information by word of mouth and in printed form; that he had looked after the apportionments in the Presbyteries; that he listed and kept in touch with all vacant churches. Nineteen of these he had helped by forming six new groups and inducing eight to make a substantial increase in the salaries paid; that he had kept in touch with five missions and had established a mission school in the mountains of Pickens County; that he kept up a constant correspondence to secure pastors for the vacant churches; that he had preached eighty-five times, held four evangelistic meetings, received three persons into the church on profession, and baptized six children in vacant churches. During the year, nearly a score of churches were aided and nearly \$6,000.00 was expended. The next year's report showed that sixty-two churches had been aided financially; nine mission points had been worked and much evangelistic activity in one Presbytery. The Superintendent had been engaged along the same lines as the previous year. He had met with thirty-two vacant churches; had brought into the Synod four additional pastors; had induced several churches to become self-

supporting, and had been instrumental in adding some \$2,255 to pastor's salaries in these churches.

The year 1912 saw no change in the personnel of the work. The report revealed thirty-nine mission points maintained, eight new churches organized, and forty-four evangelistic meetings. Financially, the Committee began with a deficit of \$246.00 and ended with a deficit of \$677.00. The contributions were \$8,117.00, a gain of \$667.00 over the previous year. The Superintendent had been instrumental in forming five new pastoral groups and increasing pastors' salaries by \$1,600.00.

At the meeting of Synod in Florence in the year 1913, the most important matter before it was the readjustment of the Presbyterian boundaries. While this was not the task of the Home Mission agency, it was made such by special act. The report was worked out by the Superintendent and taken by him to each Presbytery of the Synod at their spring meetings. The report provided for a change in the boundaries of every Presbytery save one, and created a new Presbytery around Columbia, which has taken the name of Congaree. At that time, Rev. J. Andrew Smith was elected Evangelist, he having served Enoree and Piedmont Presbyteries in that capacity during the previous year. Thirty pastors had conducted seventy-six meetings, sixty-one in organized churches, and fifteen at mission points. As a partial result of these meetings, one hundred fifty-six were added to the church on profession. Sixty-nine churches, grouped into twenty-eight pastorates, were aided to the amount of \$4,929. Fifty-four missions were reported, twenty-nine preaching points, twenty-five Sabbath Schools. Five churches had been organized. The financial support was the most liberal given in any one year up to this time.

The next year, the evangelistic effort of the General Evangelist and thirty-one pastors resulted in the addition of three hundred seventy-nine on profession. Twenty-three pastorates were aided to the amount of \$4,478. Thirty-six mission points were maintained. One church was organized. The Committee had to face a deficit of \$900 in its receipts.

The next year, the report of the Committee states that "notwithstanding the financial depression, from a spiritual point of view, we have had the best year in the history of our work.

On account of sickness in the family of our Superintendent we are without a detailed survey of the work. The General Evangelist reported eighteen meetings held by him. The financial deficit had grown to \$2,215. The Rev. G. G. Mayes gave notice that he would not be able to serve longer as Superintendent owing to serious and prolonged illness in his family. The duties of the Superintendent were accordingly added to those of the Evangelist.

The next year's report was one of the most disheartening. The Committee said, "The outlook at the beginning of the year was exceedingly dark. Our Superintendent declined reelection, his duties being assigned our Evangelist, and hardly had the year commenced before God, in His allwise providence, permitted serious sickness to become his portion." The financial deficit had been reduced, however, to \$1,970. At its meeting in Greenwood this year, 1916, the Synod elected a Superintendent and in case he declined, empowered the Committee to elect one. For the next two years the work was without a Superintendent.

By 1919, the Committee had succeeded in working off its deficit by reducing the force. By the time Synod met, it had a surplus of \$1,284. Dr. W. H. Miley in September of this year began as General Evangelist. By the meeting of Synod in 1920, the prospects had greatly brightened. Dr. Miley had met with wonderful success as Evangelist. He had conducted twenty-four meetings, the Rev. J. T. Hooker, a Methodist minister, assisting him in the singing. Four hundred sixty-six persons were added on profession, and two hundred by letter to the churches he had visited, and \$4,064 had come into the treasury as the result of his meetings. The *Presbyterian Progress* was started this year as a quarterly. The next year passed with Dr. Miley and Mr. Hooker conducting the Evangelistic work, which continued to be signally blessed. Four hundred had been added on profession as a partial result of their labors. Enoree had employed Rev. J. K. Roberts as Superintendent in that Presbytery and was making commendable progress within its bounds. The other Presbyteries seemed to have been merely "holding their own." The Rev. F. Ray Riddle was elected at this time General Superintendent.

The next year was one of great encouragement. Mr. Riddle had been active in supervision. Dr. Miley's meetings bore more fruit than ever. Six hundred and sixty-two additions on profession were reported as the visible results, and one hundred thirty-six letters called for. \$2,283.00 came into the treasury from these meetings. The total receipts from all sources this year was \$20,311.00, and a surplus of \$1,681 was reported. *Presbyterian Progress* had become a monthly. In June of 1923, Mr. Riddle resigned the Superintendency, and the Committee continued the year without such help. Mr. Hooker had ceased to work with Dr. Miley, and Mr. W. Furman Betts, a Baptist layman, had taken his place. The meetings of Dr. Miley continued in popularity, though no figures were given for this year. The surplus by this time had amounted to \$2,489. In August of 1924, Dr. E. E. Gillespie severed his relationship as Chairman, which he had held for fourteen years, his removal beyond the bounds of the Synod making this necessary. He was a man wise in council, practical in ideas, and courtesy itself in deportment toward his coworkers. The Synod lost a valued member and its Home Mission work a potent factor. The Rev. G. G. Mayes, who, during all of Dr. Gillespie's chairmanship, acted as Secretary of the Committee and editor of *Presbyterian Progress*, withdrew from official connection with the work.

Dr. J. M. Holladay was at this time made the Chairman and Mr. John A. Hafner was elected Superintendent. Dr. Miley by reason of failing health had ceased his labors as the Evangelist. With this, history might be said to end, and current events to begin.