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'What We Need Are Better People'

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A STORY that has appeared in Texas joke books for generations has an early settler telling a newcomer: "All this country needs is more rain and more good people."

The visitor replies: "Sure, that's all hell needs!"

Paul Milhouse wasn't joking when he retired recently as bishop of the United Methodist Conference of Oklahoma. He was serious, and he was right.

"What we need are better people," Bishop Milhouse declared. "People with moral and spiritual values." He added that it takes better people to build better societies.

Objectives of having better people and building better societies do not imply bringing everybody down to the same level of mediocrity. Present concepts of equality frequently do, with contradictory attitudes exhibited by many people.

They attend football games, urging athletes to put forth extra efforts in order to win and establish their favorite teams as "Number One." They want to be better in sports.

These same people may seek jobs on the basis of legalized quotas and do their work "by the book," refusing to put forth more than minimum efforts or to produce more than the average. Many show little desire to become better persons and no intention of becoming No. 1 on the job. They only want to be paid maximum rates for minimum effort.

A wave of self-centered permissiveness developed after World War II. It is based upon the selfish attitude that any individual has a right to do whatever seems right in his own eyes. It results in individuals setting their own standards of conduct, without necessarily considering effects on families, friends, employers or society.

For many, this means a disregard of such conventional procedures as marriage, personal and property rights of others, or patriotic support of the government under which we live.

The outcome is debauchery, alcoholism, drug addiction, murders, thefts and burglaries, dishonesty in business and government, broken

homes, illiterate and unemployable young people, and decay of responsibilities as citizens, as parents and as a people.

It would be hard to make a reasonable argument that such trends result in better people building better societies. There is evidence that these attitudes have contributed materially toward slippage of the United States of America in national defense, industrial productivity and in respect in the eyes of the world.

Now that we have come under national policies that lead toward ordinariness in most fields of endeavor, our country is moving rapidly in that direction. Certainly, there still are people who want to achieve more and be more, but non-achievers seem to be gaining.

If ours is to be a better nation, a better society, and a better people, we must look for better quality of personal living as individuals. As Bishop Milhouse stated, to be better we need to have moral and spiritual values of our own.