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April 3, 1996

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Baptists give comfort, aid
to orphaned Russian girl

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
4/3/96

DUNLAP, Tenn. (BP)--A 13-year-old Russian girl living in Tennessee has experienced enough personal tragedy in the last few months to last a lifetime.

Fortunately, Olga Polyakova also has seen the love of Christ at work thanks to members of several Sequatchie Valley Baptist Association churches and the community at large who have rallied around her.

Earlier this year Olga's father was killed in an automobile accident in Georgia.

After the accident, Olga and her mother, Marianna, moved to the United States because that had been a wish of her father. Marianna went to work for a cleaning company and was assigned to Dunlap, Tenn. The mother and daughter moved to the area and, though neither spoke English, began attending First Baptist Church, said pastor Tom Gholson.

The two were beginning to get settled. Olga had been placed in a fourth-grade class at Griffith Elementary School so she could begin to learn the English language.

On March 14, however, the family fell victim to tragedy once again.

Olga's mother was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver, leaving Olga in a foreign land with no family. She did have friends, however.

The community has surrounded Olga and enveloped her with love, Gholson said. "The town has really responded from the heart. We have been moved and saddened by this."

Area residents financed Marianna's funeral at a local funeral home. Approximately 200 people attended the funeral, though most did not know Marianna, said Gholson, who along with Ronnie Grooms, pastor of Cartwright Baptist Church, assisted with the funeral which was conducted by a Greek Orthodox minister from Chattanooga. The Polyakovas had attended an Orthodox church in Russia.

The funeral crowd included several Russian families from Chattanooga, Cleveland, Tenn., and Dalton, Ga., who heard about the tragedy and attended even though they did not know the family, Gholson said. A meal was served at the church following the funeral.

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Gholson noted some of the Russians seemed shocked at the outpouring of love to Olga. "That made an impression on the Russians," he said.

Since the tragedy, members from First, Cartwright and Ewtonville Baptist churches, along with others in the community, have helped financially and spiritually.

Olga was placed in temporary foster care with Frank and Pamela Ryle who are members of First Baptist. She is now living with her teacher, Pam Kiper, a member of Ewtonville church.

The pastor noted many people have wanted to help but simply did not know what to do so they have given money and moral support. A fund for Olga was established at a local bank.

Olga, who turned 13 just 15 days after her mother's death, has continued to attend church.

Her future in Dunlap, however, is uncertain, Gholson said. There is a possibility she could be adopted by a local family or she may be placed with a Russian family in another area. The Tennessee Department of Human Services will make that decision, Gholson said.

Despite her young age, Olga is well aware of what has happened, the pastor observed. "At the funeral it tugged at your heart to see what this 12-year-old is facing -- losing two parents in a land where she is alone without family. Just to see that look of sadness on her face was overwhelming," Gholson said.

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North Korea food aid shipped
by Baptists as crisis grows

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
4/3/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The first shipment of Southern Baptist food aid for North Koreans suffering from flood-induced famine is crossing the Pacific. Others will follow.

A load of 609 boxes of food from North Carolina Baptists is to arrive by ship in South Korea around April 11 for repacking and shipment north. Two more shipments, from Texas Baptists, are to reach North Korea by May 1.

So far, churches in 13 states have promised up to 45 large shipping containers. Participating states: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. In addition, Oklahoma Baptists and others are raising money for the effort. At an estimated value of \$15,000 per container, the aid pledged could amount to \$675,000.

Cooperative Services International (CSI), the Southern Baptist overseas aid agency, hopes to send at least 100 containers packed with food staples such as dried beans, powdered milk, cornmeal, flour and rice.

A sticker on each box of food aid will read in Korean and English: "Love gift from Southern Baptist Christians of the United States of America."

CSI launched the effort in January with an initial \$500,000 appropriation for food and shipment costs after North Korea -- long known for its secrecy and isolation -- issued a rare appeal for international food aid.

A six-person delegation of Southern Baptist representatives will visit North Korea in April to meet with government officials and survey hunger-stricken areas. Their arrival is expected to coincide with the arrival in a North Korean port of 200 tons of flour also purchased with Southern Baptist relief funds.

The Southern Baptist WMU (women's organization) and Brotherhood Commission (men's organization) joined the project to promote and coordinate state-by-state collection of foodstuffs provided by local churches. Korean-American Southern Baptists also have become heavily involved; they aim to fill up to 20 shipping containers under the coordination of the national Korean Baptist Fellowship.

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The flooding in North Korea last summer destroyed thousands of homes and buildings and devastated the grain harvest. Resulting food shortages directly affected up to 5 million North Koreans, according to relief groups. The Red Cross warned earlier this year that 120,000 North Koreans could die before the next harvest without action.

"The situation is so bad that people in some (North Korean) provinces are reduced to eating leaves," said United Nations spokesman Ahmad Fawzi in a March 21 press briefing. "Things have not improved. They were extremely serious a few months ago. They are even worse now."

Remaining stocks of North Korean rice are running out, reported Laura Boldrini of the U.N.'s World Food Program (WFP). "This is the most critical period," she said.

To make matters worse, a WFP-chartered ship carrying 6,538 tons of rice from Thailand to North Korea sank March 19 in stormy seas in the Taiwan Strait. Fifteen crew members were lost and presumed drowned. The rice was donated by the United States, Switzerland, Australia and the relief group CARITAS. One WFP official estimated the lost rice could have fed 750,000 people for three weeks. A second ship has embarked, carrying 8,500 tons of rice, and should arrive in North Korea between April 15 and 20.

"The crisis is deepening," said a Cooperative Services International worker. "They really are desperate for food."

Financial contributions to the North Korea relief project may be sent to CSI, P.O. Box 6841, Richmond, VA 23230; to the WMU Vision Fund, 100 Missionary Ridge, Birmingham, AL 35242-4352; or to the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104.

Those seeking more information may call WMU toll-free at 800-295-6536 or Brotherhood at 800-280-1891.

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CSI representative answers

'why' of North Korean project

By Teresa Dickens

Baptist Press

4/3/96

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Some Southern Baptists have questioned why the denomination is involved in a project to aid North Korea, a government often hostile to the United States.

In an interview with WMU, a Cooperative Services International representative answered questions surrounding the effort.

WMU: Who will receive the food?

CSI: Our intention is that the food donated by Southern Baptists will go to the people in North Korea who are hungry and live in the flood-devastated areas of the country.

WMU: How will Southern Baptists know if the food reaches these people?

CSI: CSI will be sending in a survey team in early April who will be able to check and see who received the food. Some of the first shipments should arrive while the survey team is in the country. Now, we have to understand that when this food arrives in North Korea, it becomes North Korean property. They could break their promise, and we will have no recourse except not to send other food aid. All we have to go on is their word and their past track record. The United Nations and the International Red Cross have said repeatedly that as they have been on the ground there and have checked, they have found no evidence of diversion of the emergency aid that is being sent into the country.

WMU: Has North Korea agreed to nuclear inspections by United Nations officials?

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CSI: Yes they have, but of course there are still very real political differences between the United States and North Korea. People are naturally concerned because the United States and North Korea are not on the friendliest of terms. Nuclear inspections have been played up greatly in the U.S. press. It is very much a political issue in the U.S. government's ongoing negotiations with North Korea. However, I am not sure how much this should impinge on this project to feed hungry people, but in some people's mind it is very important.

WMU: Does the U.S. government oppose giving humanitarian aid to North Korea?

CSI: No. The official policy is that the U.S. government is in favor of giving humanitarian aid to North Korea and only about three or four weeks ago, made a \$2 million contribution for the purchase of rice. Unfortunately, the ship carrying this rice sank March 19 in the Taiwan straits during a storm, thus delaying the delivery of much-needed foodstuff.

Fortunately, the ship was insured and I understand that a new shipment is being prepared. In addition, the U.S. Treasury and Commerce departments have been very helpful to U.S. charitable organizations wanting to send aid to North Korea. CSI has an export license granted by the U.S. government for sending such aid to North Korea.

WMU: Are Southern Baptists the only group sending humanitarian aid into North Korea?

CSI: No. The International Red Cross recently announced a new fund-raising drive for relief in North Korea. Numerous other groups are also involved in the effort, including the United Council of Churches and the various aid organizations related to United Nations.

WMU: Since North Korea is an atheist country and is known for its persecution of Christians, why should Southern Baptists help the country?

CSI: The command of Jesus is that we reach out, and explain and share the love of Jesus with everyone. We are to give a cup of cold water or food or clothing to people who are in need. Whether or not people believe in God or whether or not they are persecuting Christians should not be a condition of us giving help to people who are in need.

WMU: Sending food into North Korea is a way of helping the government. Would it not be better to let them experience famine and force the government to fall?

CSI: This humanitarian aid does take a burden off of the North Korea government, but your question is a political one. Our concern is to aid the suffering people in North Korea. We are operating under the command of Jesus to help people who are experiencing famine and shortage. When I, as a Christian, help someone, I must commit to God the final results of how this person receives my aid. I cannot alter the person's response to that aid. But God can alter that response. We do God's will by obeying him, and he works his good will. The same is true in this famine relief project.

WMU: How do you explain the news reports coming out of South Korea that say there is no famine in North Korea?

CSI: We have to understand that the South Korean government is responding as a government. The government's statements about the situation in North Korea have to be seen as a government that is basically an adversary of North Korea. I do read the South Korean press and am aware of what the government is saying, but at the same time, I believe we need to give a great deal of credence to what the United Nations, the International Red Cross and other aid representatives who have been in to North Korea are saying about the severe conditions in the country.

WMU: What would you say to encourage Korean War veterans and others who remember the brutality of the nation to be involved in this project?

CSI: This is an opportunity for Southern Baptists to extend a helping hand in the name of Jesus and say, not necessarily as Americans, but as Christians and as Southern Baptists, "In the name of the Lord, we are concerned for your well-being and we want to express the love of God to you." We are called to be obedient to our Lord and this is our way of doing that.

New Orleans casino ad on SBC housing reply

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Some Southern Baptists who reserved rooms in New Orleans in June for the SBC annual meeting got a shock recently when they received confirmation or cancellation form notices with an advertisement for a casino on the back from the New Orleans housing bureau.

Jack Wilkerson, convention manager and vice president for business and finance for the SBC Executive Committee, said he understands the concern of people who received the forms -- which also have an advertisement for the airport shuttle.

Noting, however, that it is a pre-printed form used by the New Orleans housing bureau, Wilkerson said, "It is one of those forms where a machine types information on the outside of the form and it prints the information in blocks inside the form." Although it reads "SBC Housing Bureau" on the return address, he said, it comes from the New Orleans Housing Bureau and has a New Orleans city and street address.

"It simply was whether we wanted to have a custom-printed form, without the casino advertising, and pay a thousand additional Cooperative Program dollars to do so. With the rising costs of the annual meeting, we elected not to have a custom form for the SBC," Wilkerson said. "Convention planning requires that we be prudent stewards of the funds entrusted to us."

The SBC annual meeting is June 11-13 in the Superdome in New Orleans. The SBC has long, and publicly, opposed gambling in any form, Wilkerson said, and opposes the gambling in the new casinos in New Orleans.

"For our meeting we will spend several thousand dollars to cover objectional signs hanging in the Superdome," Wilkerson said. "Southern Baptists attending the SBC meeting need to be sensitive that the direction of the city has been to more organized gambling. It will be important we share the gospel and be a witness for Lord while there."

The housing cancellation form was sent to those who had earlier reserved rooms in one of the hotels listed on the housing request form but who had not sent in a deposit for the required one night. Wilkerson said he has had inquiries about the form from individuals as well as state Baptist editors.

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Drug-induced abortion may be
widely available in near future By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
4/3/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Drug-induced abortion may become widely available in the United States by the end of the year. By then, there even may be two drug combinations in widespread use for abortions early in pregnancy.

On March 29, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America announced it hoped to offer this year a two-drug combination for women seeking abortions. On April 1, parties responsible for the American production of RU 486, a French abortion pill, said an application had been filed seeking approval from the Food and Drug Administration and it was hoped the drug would be available by the end of 1996.

Both methods use two drugs. The one under consideration by Planned Parenthood utilizes methotrexate, normally used for chemotherapy, to end the child's life and Cytotec, usually an ulcer medication, several days later to cause contractions which eject the child's body. RU 486, or mifepristone, is a pill which kills the unborn child. A couple of days after a mother takes RU 486, she returns for a prostaglandin which completes the abortion.

Neither has been tested past the first nine weeks of pregnancy.

While PPFA and other abortion advocates applauded the potential availability of other procedures, especially ones which will be more private, pro-lifers not only decried what it would do to the unborn but to mothers as well.

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"Like the RU 486 abortion methods, this new drug cocktail can cause serious complications for the mother and kills a child with a beating heart," said Olivia Gans, director of American Victims of Abortion, a post-abortion outreach of the National Right to Life Committee.

Southern Baptist ethics specialist Ben Mitchell said, "Can an abortion cocktail that kills the baby and forces her to be expelled from the mother's body really be good for the mother? Clearly, there have to be complications. There are sometimes complications during pregnancy in the best of circumstances. When you add chemical bullets aimed at the developing infant, dire complications will necessarily result in some cases.

"Of course we're not surprised that Planned Parenthood is searching for less-messy ways to perform abortions," said Mitchell, consultant on biomedical and life issues for the Christian Life Commission. "No rational human being can continue killing other human beings without experiencing profound psychological complications."

The Food and Drug Administration, Mitchell said, "was established to protect human lives from products which might have harmful effects. Now, it is in the position of approving a drug which has as its primary use the destruction of unborn life. This just shows how far our culture has descended into barbarity."

A spokesman for the FDA refused to speculate on how long the review process for RU 486 would take, although The New York Times reported applications to the FDA are requiring six months to a year for action.

"The FDA has said if we receive an application for this drug we would treat it like any other new drug application," said the FDA's Larry Bachorik. "We will review it thoroughly for safety and efficacy."

While PPFA spokesman Steve Plever said there was no timetable for offering the other drug method, Planned Parenthood President Jane Johnson told the Associated Press the organization expected it to take place this year. Alexander Sanger, head of PPFA's New York City affiliate, told AP he expected his clinic to use the method by June.

PPFA is the country's largest abortion provider.

"It's important that our (national) medical committee just be satisfied that it will be safe and effective," PPFA's Plever said of the two-drug procedure.

Some abortion doctors already have used methotrexate and Cytotec to do abortions since initial tests of the method were announced in 1993. The manufacturers of both drugs have protested the use of the medications for abortion. The FDA has not approved methotrexate for abortion, but that has not prevented some doctors from prescribing it "off label."

Some abortion advocates said RU 486 eventually would have an advantage over the other method for doctors who want to use drug-induced procedures.

The Population Council, which has the United States patent rights to RU 486, also announced it had given the exclusive right to arrange for the manufacture and distribution of the drug to a new company, Advances in Health Technology, according to The New York Times. The company is located in the Washington, D.C., area, a Population Council spokesperson told Baptist Press.

The National Right to Life Committee, the Christian Life Committee and other pro-life organizations sought to prevent Roussel Uclaf, the French developer of RU 486, and its German parent company, Hoechst AG, from introducing the abortion pill to the United States after it was made legal in France, Great Britain and Sweden. The patent rights were granted to the Population Council in 1994, however. The organization conducted clinical trials at more than a dozen sites beginning in the fall of the same year.

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Mitchell recommended pro-lifers participate in a boycott of products by Hoechst Marion Roussel. The CLC is promoting the boycott and has a list of drugs on the list available at its Nashville, Tenn., office.

Mitchell also recommended women ask their obstetrician/gynecologists if they prescribe methotrexate for abortions. If so, women should change doctors, Mitchell said.

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**Efforts in leader training
change to meet needs overseas**

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
4/3/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Call Brasswell Nkhonjera a disciple. Or call him a church leader. Because he's both.

At age 24 and with a young family, Nkhonjera had grown fascinated with the Christian faith. Sam Upton, a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary, met him then in a church in Malawi.

Once, Upton might have urged this fiery young believer to leave his church, move his family to a strange city and attend seminary. But this is a new day, and Upton -- a worker in theological education -- realizes it.

Nkhonjera's life -- how he became pastor of a key Baptist church in Malawi while earning a seminary education without ever attending seminary -- is part of an unfinished story about how missionaries and their overseas partners are changing the way they turn disciples into leaders.

Evangelism, as it gains steam overseas, creates a dilemma: how to find leaders for the record numbers of new church-starting opportunities, said Jim Slack, the Foreign Mission Board's church growth analyst. The theological education by extension (TEE) Nkhonjera received at his church is one solution.

The Foreign Mission Board's 1995 statistical report shows the number of Bible schools and seminaries jumped in one year by 136 percent -- from 252 to 595 -- while enrollment rose to 20,307. Seminary growth is vital, but not enough, Slack said. Resource-hungry institutions cannot create enough pastors to meet the need for grassroots preaching points. And young congregations cannot afford full-time pastors. Others must be trained for those spots.

"The great growth we have enjoyed will continue to live as long as we solve our discipleship needs," said Slack. "Evangelism is just the leading edge of church growth. How well we do leadership training is critical."

Enrollment in discipleship programs -- which serve as a base for new leaders -- increased from 1994 by 74 percent, from 95,407 to 166,408. The number of student centers, another method of developing leaders, grew from 294 to 509. And the number of TEE centers jumped from 906 to 1,528.

In the more introductory area of discipleship -- Bible teaching ministries such as Sunday schools -- missionaries and their overseas partners showed an 11 percent growth in the number of participants, to 2,529,828.

Several countries in eastern and southern Africa serve as models for a healthy balance between the levels of leadership training, Slack said. Upton and other missionaries are working to perfect plans to identify future leaders by training illiterates and literates alike with TEE at local settings. TEE keeps students home to earn a living while they work in their churches. In Malawi, up to 250 people participate in TEE now.

After TEE, Nkhonjera attended Bible school for four eight-week terms over two years. That allowed him to stay at home the rest of the time teaching Bible studies in his church. Soon, his pastor asked him to lead a preaching point. He began attending a "de-centralized seminary" -- six two-week sessions a year for four years. Now he is pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Nzimba.

"The key is to make leadership training as varied as we can and to try to teach people where they are, so it's as practical as possible," said Upton.

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In the Philippines, missionary Allen Hill has developed the extensive use of media to disciple new believers. About 15,000 students are enrolled in a correspondence course titled, "The New Beginning." Its primary purpose: evangelism leading to church involvement.

"I have learned a lot from my studies," said Grace Pasigado, who has participated in the correspondence program. She is helping lead Bible studies on college campuses. "I take pride that I consider myself able to compete with those who went to Bible school."

More creative efforts in discipleship appear likely. Sam James, the board's vice president for creative leadership development, is working in 26 countries to develop church growth strategy studies. The studies point out a need to strengthen leadership training and discipleship efforts to create a greater pool of people who can meet needs in new, young congregations, he said.

"Our highest emphasis has been among our highest levels of leadership," he said. "We have severely neglected the lower three levels, such as the Sunday school teacher, the outreach leader, the lay pastor -- those who go out and start churches without a salary."

Soon James will begin evaluating theological education and leadership training efforts globally. That could trigger course corrections on some mission fields where, historically, church growth has bogged down in the often-neglected flip side to evangelism: making disciples and training leaders.

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**Endangered Species Act campaign
gets mixed reviews from Baptists** By Darrell Turner

**Baptist Press
4/3/96**

WASHINGTON (BP)--An evangelical Christian lobbying campaign to support the Endangered Species Act has drawn mixed reactions from Southern Baptist leaders.

The campaign by the Evangelical Environmental Network, which claims to represent more than 1,000 local congregations, involves a \$1 million effort in public service announcements in 18 states to support federal funding to enforce the act.

"The Earth is the Lord's, and human beings are called to be stewards of God's gorgeous garden," said Ron Sider, professor of theology and culture at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wynnewood, Pa., when the campaign was launched earlier this year. Most of the nation's evangelical Christians, Sider said, citing surveys, have a deep concern about the environment and want strong laws to protect it.

One 60-second radio ad sponsored by the network begins, "In the Book of Genesis, Noah builds an ark and saves all living species from destruction. Well today, God's creatures are threatened by our own great flood -- of pollution or habitat destruction. And that's why America has built an ark -- the Endangered Species Act."

Observers are divided on whether drafts of bills to reauthorize the 23-year-old law would unduly weaken its provisions.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, declined two years ago to sign the Evangelical Environmental Network's "Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" because of concerns about some of its language. However, the commission devoted its 1991 national conference to environmental concerns, and the agency offers a number of environmental-related materials in the ethics resources it provides to Southern Baptist churches.

Concerning the Endangered Species Act, however, Land said it "has been, on the whole, an unmitigated disaster ... a classic example of how federal policies and federal bureaucracies often have an effect exactly the opposite of that which was intended."

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The act "has done little to protect 'endangered' species and, in the process, has done much to ruin individual human lives and to trample upon basic property rights," Land continued. "Federal bureaucrats have used the Endangered Species Act to seize from property owners the right to build homes, plow fields, build fences and even clear firebreaks to protect their homes on their own property. Further, the Endangered Species Act has penalized land owners for owning wildlife habitats, thus giving incentives to people to destroy the very habitats that the act was passed to protect. The Endangered Species Act often interferes with constructive attempts at private conservation.

Acknowledging "that there are those in the evangelical world who argue that the Endangered Species Act is the modern equivalent of Noah's ark," Land described it as "a poor and inaccurate application of Scripture. Noah saved at least two of every creature, not all of every creature."

While it is "in our enlightened self-interest to keep some of every creature alive so we can discover why it was God created it," Land said: "To insist that we attempt to save all of every species at the expense of human suffering and serious human dislocation reveals a set of priorities which should be unacceptable. It was in order to retain the ability to make precisely these kinds of important distinctions that led the Christian Life Commission to adopt a policy of formulating and promulgating a theology of the environment independently of other organizations and coalitions."

Meanwhile, one of the original signers of the EEN's declaration was David Gushee, assistant ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He endorsed the campaign to preserve the Endangered Species Act, saying, "I see it as not only a human responsibility but also a Christian responsibility to be wise stewards of God's creation and to protect the diversity of the non-human creation God has made. When we as human beings are responsible for the extinction of a species, I think this should be understood as a sinful act, and we need to exercise appropriate care over creation."

Forrest Mims of Sequin, Texas, a Southern Baptist who has written more than 50 books and articles on science and technology, said he agreed with the network's concern for protecting species but was cautious about federal efforts in this area.

He cited a situation in which the federal government attempted to regulate development in central Texas that might adversely affect a particular species of bird, which led landowners to begin killing the birds. "So the end result was that very likely, more birds were destroyed by landowners concerned about government regulation of their land than might otherwise have been destroyed," Mims said.

Commenting on the theological concerns raised by the network, Mims said, "The Scripture not only give us stewardship of the Earth, but God created the species for man; he did not create man for the species. That's not to say that I endorse human beings eliminating endangered species. It's simply that we have to have the proper perspective on this as Christians.

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Turner is the religion writer at the Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette.

**Beware of teens dabbling
in occult, academician says** By Joyce Sweeney Martin

**Baptist Press
4/3/96**

STANFORD, Ky. (BP)--Interest in the occult is one of the fastest-growing phenomena in the United States, and teenagers especially are vulnerable, according to an academician who has done extensive study of the occult.

But teens don't understand that when they dabble they are "playing with Satan," said Charles Rice, dean at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College.

Rice led a workshop on the occult during Kentucky Baptist Convention-sponsored conferences on cults in early March. Stanford Baptist Church and the Clear Creek college hosted the meetings.

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The "occult" is an umbrella term which includes divination, astrology, palmistry, crystal gazing, Ouija board and Tarot cards, magic (not sleight-of-hand tricks), witchcraft, communicating with the dead and Satanism.

Rice said curiosity and peer pressure may entice youth to be drawn into the "soft stuff," such as books, the Ouija board, Dungeons and Dragons games and music and videos which promote the occult. But often, youth soon find themselves into "a power which they can't control," he said.

Rice illustrated that power by showing a clip from a Geraldo Rivera television show in which Rivera documented the rise of Satanism among teens. Rivera cited several specific cases to show heavy metal music's connection to Satanism and to show Satanic rituals such as grave robbing.

While Satanism is the darkest side of the occult, it is the hardest to classify, Rice said.

Satanists can be divided into two groups, he explained: 1) those who do not believe in a literal Satan but are opposed to Christianity and see Satan as a symbol of that opposition and 2) those who believe Satan exists and worship him as a powerful god.

"If Satanists could be characterized in one term, it would be 'self-serving,'" Rice said. "One's own needs, desires, beliefs and goals are supreme."

Christian parents should "quit saying their kids aren't at risk," Rice said. "Denial is Satan's greatest tool of deceit."

At a time when teens already are questioning values -- including their parents' religious faith -- teens are very much at risk, he said.

"Teens see things in black and white with no gray," Rice said. Thus, when parents tell their children they cannot listen to hard-rock music or watch MTV, teens counter with questions about the un-Christian lyrics of their parents' country music, he said.

"What's so different about Country Music Television than MTV?" he asked. To counteract, "early help and intervention is essential," Rice said. "Get involved in your teens' lives" by being proactive rather than reactive, he suggested.

Engage in serious discussions about good and evil, Rice said. For example, analyze music and movies by asking questions such as: What's the message? Does it honor God or Satan or self-centeredness? How are people treated? Does it promote a lifestyle you really want for yourself?

"Turn off the television and buy a kitchen table," he said.

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New Southern Baptist church gets
American Baptist church's help By Karen L. Willoughby

Baptist Press
4/3/96

VISALIA, Calif. (BP)--An American Baptist pastor credits the discipleship training study "Experiencing God" for prompting a helping hand to a fledgling Southern Baptist congregation.

"We had been thinking we'd like to do something with Hispanic ministry," said Harold G. Meers, pastor of First Baptist Church, Visalia, Calif., which at about 2,000 members is one of the five largest churches in the American Baptist Convention USA.

The small group at Valley Oaks Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation, was "on the right track and it looked to me it would be better to help them succeed than it would be to go on our own," Meers said. "Our decision was guided by Experiencing God. We found where God was at work and joined him."

Southern Baptists and American (formerly Northern) Baptists have kept their distance since they split in 1845 over the issue of slavery.

Despite the denominational gap, First Baptist in Visalia bought a vacant church building for \$215,000 and is now leasing it to Valley Oaks for \$1 a year.

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Charles Chaney, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board official in the area of church starts, said to the best of his knowledge it marks the first time since 1845 that Southern and American Baptists have participated to such an extent in a joint mission project.

American and Southern Baptist leaders and church members met March 17 at Valley Oaks' new home in Visalia to dedicate the building and share fellowship to God's honor and glory, said Valley Oaks' pastor, Isidro Carrasco.

Valley Oaks was a mission of Woodland Drive (Southern) Baptist Church for four years, until incorporating as a full-fledged church in January. The founding co-pastors, Ernie Martinez, now a student at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary in the San Francisco area, and Carrasco, then members at Woodland, saw a need for ministry to English-speaking Hispanics in north Visalia.

As Carrasco put it, "This ethnic group has fallen through the cracks in every evangelical denomination. No one was reaching out to them."

They started with a weeknight Bible study in the home of a non-believing couple. "Slowly but surely, a lot of the people we have now were converted to Christ," Carrasco said. "Because the group of people we started with were non-believers, obviously they had a lot of nonbelieving friends." Within four months of the first Bible study, the group had become larger than home-size. They moved three more times before settling into their permanent church home in February.

The original few couples have grown to an average attendance of about 55 and as many as 100 for special services.

"We're out there trying to meet the needs of the community," Carrasco said. "There's a lot of problems with broken homes, but then that's true almost anywhere; a lot of abuse -- verbal, physical; a lot of violence -- teen-agers and gangs; a lot of bad marriages.

"Our goal is to be a church where people have learned to build a new life in Christ and to build a strong marriage, to build good parenting skills and to find a purpose and meaning in life other than has been expressed in the past through violence," he continued. "We have seminars and classes to help; we have three small groups and will be expanding in the future as we develop leaders; we try to disciple our people to have good relationships with the Lord and each other."

How did an American Baptist church get involved in this Southern Baptist ministry?

Meers attended a musical performance at Woodland, where he met pastor Mark Adams. The two met later that week for lunch and Valley Oaks came up in the conversation.

The joint venture started almost casually -- Valley Oaks was invited to set up an office in First Baptist's spacious new facilities and various other assistance was provided. Then Meers saw an article in the Visalia Times-Delta daily newspaper about a church building in north Visalia for sale.

"It was totally in my mind for five months," Meers said. Then he talked with a layman in his church, whose skilled negotiation brought the asking price down from \$425,000 to \$215,000.

"The building over there is the investment in order to give this ministry its maximum to minister to and reach the Hispanic community," Meers said. "We're blessed enough that we did it without borrowing money." First Baptist also has contributed 20 tables, 100 chairs, a refrigerator and video set to Valley Oaks.

And Meers said he expects people from First Baptist will be involved in hands-on ministry with Valley Oaks.

"The quality of leadership and the commitment exhibited in pastor Isidro was very influential in our being willing to invest in Valley Oaks," Meers said. "We believe he is gifted, trained and doing an excellent job of discipling and leading the church and in establishing an outreach ministry."

California Southern Baptists are providing \$1,000 a month for a year, possibly two, for operational expenses. And Valley Oaks has been challenged to provide a full-time salary for its pastor, who until now has been bivocational, working as a high school teacher.

Carrasco credits Meers' visionary leadership for birthing the joint venture.

"I think Dr. Meers is a great facilitator," Carrasco said. "He makes it possible for a lot of ministry to happen and I think does that very well, not only for us but for several other churches. He kind of makes more ministry possible."

Valley Oaks will be dually aligned with both denominations, Carrasco said. For the rest of this budget year, however, missions giving will be keyed to Southern Baptist causes.

"This is a kind of unique situation all the way around," Carrasco said.

"Basically, here are two conventions and they both would love to minister to people in north Visalia.

"This (partnership) is something that was very practical and very good for everyone involved -- our church, Southern Baptists, American Baptists and English-speaking Hispanics," he continued. "Sometime in the future we hope to be able to help other people both in the American and Southern Baptist churches to reach the same kind of people who are in north Visalia -- English-speaking Hispanics.

"Being able to extend the kingdom of God through the gospel of Christ, that's the bottom line," Carrasco said.

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His passion for missions
propelled church worldwide

By Yvonne Terry White

Baptist Press
4/3/96

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--Dick Thomassian has taken Jesus' command in the Great Commission literally -- to go to all nations with the gospel -- and his church has followed his lead.

"Brother Dick," as members of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., fondly call their minister of music and missions, has been doing volunteer mission work for the past 30 years. During that time he has either personally gone on or led more than 100 mission trips to 30 or 40 countries to spread the gospel. He has worked not only in evangelistic campaigns but also in other projects such as carpentry or medical missions.

"Dick and I have both believed for a long time that the best way to teach missions is to get involved," said Whitesburg pastor Jimmy Jackson. "Our church's emphasis on missions has created a mission spirit in the lives of our people and a strong base of people who really love mission work."

While acknowledging the importance of helping people in Third World nations through financial means as well as food, clothes and medical supplies, Thomassian said he remains convinced the top priority of missionaries should be evangelism.

"I think we need to challenge and train laypeople to know how to share the gospel," said Thomassian as he sat in his office surrounded by his infamous collection of about 300 camels in every shape, size and color.

"I think that carpentry work, medical work, social work, educational work and everything else we do as missionaries is wonderful -- and in no way am I saying we should not do those things -- but I also think there should be a planned and executed evangelistic thrust on the mission field, and we need to encourage people to think that way," he said.

Today, Thomassian's ministry at Whitesburg is practically consumed by mission work, while his son, Tim, handles most of the music program. "I love music, but my heart lies with mission work," said Thomassian. "We are beginning to make plans where I will eventually concentrate primarily on our mission program. But that will come as no surprise to those who know me and know my love for missions."

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While Thomassian believes Southern Baptists are a vital force in mission work around the world, he said it is time to rethink the strategy of the denomination.

"It has taken Southern Baptists 150 years to put between 4,000 and 5,000 missionaries on the field, and that's just not enough to spread the gospel around the world," he said.

"I think all of us (in mission work) are beginning to realize we need to put more emphasis on training local people to go into countries to work, and local (church) leaders need to lead the laity in the work."

Thomassian said he has a dream of seeing 1,000 Baptist churches throughout the world follow Whitesburg's lead in volunteer missions, which takes about \$50,000 of the church's budget each year.

He said about 1,000, or one-fifth, of Whitesburg's 5,000 members have participated in one or more of the church's volunteer mission trips during the last three decades.

The church is planning several mission trips for the summer, including a stay in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympic Games and in New Orleans for the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting. Mission groups from Whitesburg also will be going to France, Germany and Portugal.

Whitesburg pays the transportation and accommodations of members who travel to places in the continental United States. However, the church only pays hotel accommodations of those who go overseas for a mission trip.

Thomassian said he is thrilled over the response of the Whitesburg members to his call for mission volunteers. But, he said, the real key to winning people to Christ will be through the training of local residents of foreign countries so they may serve as witnesses and ministers of the gospel.

"I can't say enough about what our career missionaries mean to us," he said. "But you are often talking about one missionary per hundreds of thousands of people, and that just isn't enough. It takes several years before the local people trust you enough to accept you. The quickest way to get the message of salvation to those people is to train the local people to do what we've been doing, and they will be accepted more quickly than an outsider."

Thomassian's work as a volunteer missionary inspired him to write a book, "Building a Local Church Mission Dream Team ... Some Assembly Required." It was written, he said, from his desire to encourage more local church people to be involved in Christian missions.

Thomassian said not only has the awareness of the need for missionaries increased at Whitesburg through the mission projects, but gifts to Southern Baptist mission offerings, such as Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, have grown significantly in recent years. The church went \$10,000 beyond its Lottie Moon goal of \$150,000 this year.

While Whitesburg's mission evangelism teams have traveled throughout the world in the last three years spreading the gospel, the church also has been busy in its own backyard with an assignment at Huntsville's Downtown Rescue Mission. And Whitesburg teams have completed assignments in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Orlando, New York, Massachusetts, Jamaica, Brazil, Israel and France.

"Frequently churches will suffocate by shutting their doors and windows to the 'all nations' of the Great Commission," Thomassian said.

"It is right for Christians to exercise an all-out effort to reach their own city for Christ. What a farce it would be to do missions elsewhere to the neglect of missions at home. It is likewise right for Christians to exercise an all-out effort to reach 'all nations,' or all people groups, for Christ. It is right because Jesus said to do it. We dare not stay home while a world perishes."

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White is a religion writer for The Huntsville Times and a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist newsjournal.

**Retired pastor-missionary gets
Purple Heart 51 years later** **By Bonnie Verlander**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--John Virgil Colson, a retired pastor and missionary, finally received the Purple Heart on March 29 for his heroism 51 years ago.

On Nov. 30, 1944, then First Lieutenant Colson, an Army Air Corps pilot, was on his 25th bombing mission to raid railroad marshaling yards at Nuenkircheen in Germany's Czar Valley.

The formation of B-24 bombers flew 23,000 feet over the heavily clouded target. At noon, Colson's bombardier pressed the bomb release when a shell from heavy enemy anti-aircraft fire struck the open bomb bay.

Reports from the crews of nearby planes said Colson's aircraft was ripped in two in the midst of a fireball, exploding in streams of red and orange. They saw no parachutes in the falling debris following the explosion. The entire crew of 10 men and one officer observer were presumed dead.

However, through God's intervention, according to Colson, he survived.

"One second I was in my pilot seat. The next instant I was spinning, falling head over heels through space. My severed oxygen hose was slapping me in the face," Colson recounted. "That's what brought me to my senses. I had lost consciousness when I was blown out of my B-24."

After managing to yank his rip cord, Colson's parachute opened and he descended onto a hillside. He spent the next five days avoiding enemy artillery and hiding and waiting for the advance of U.S. troops.

But Colson never encountered the Americans and, instead, was taken prisoner by German soldiers.

Although depressed and lonely, Colson said he still found joy during 23 days of solitary confinement and six months at Stalag Luft No. 1, a prison camp near Barth on the Baltic Sea.

After five days of solitary confinement, "God gave me a feeling, an assurance, that the Germans would not break me. I could resist them," he said. "I immediately began singing hymns. The feeling was so overwhelming. From that point on, I never questioned God's purpose for my life."

Within months, Russian troops liberated Colson and his fellow prisoners. The wounded soldiers were given ribbons and told their Purple Heart medals would be awarded later.

But the Purple Heart for Colson never came until 51 years later, when Rear Admiral Kevin Delaney, commander of the naval base in Jacksonville, Fla., heard Colson speak at a memorial service on base and allude to the fact he'd never received the medal. Delaney was shocked at the oversight and made sure Colson was properly honored.

"I figured I'd never see the medal and that was OK," Colson said.

Colson's wife, Grace, said she tried on a few occasions to correct the mistake but her efforts were futile.

"I sent a couple of letters to different military offices and they always told me to contact someone else," she said. "Eventually I just gave up."

"His action and courage epitomize the word 'hero,'" Delaney said during the March 29 ceremony. But no speech or medal can adequately show appreciation for Colson, Delaney added. As well as presenting the citation and the medal, the officer proclaimed March 29 as "John Virgil Colson Day."

After his discharge from the military, Colson completed an undergraduate degree at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., and later graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Colson is also a doctoral graduate of the California Graduate School of Theology in Glendale.

But it was during days at SWBTS when Colson met a fellow student who would later become his wife and when he made a commitment to overseas ministries.

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"I told the Lord I'd go anywhere, anytime," Colson said. After graduation from SWBTS, Colson became pastor of Berryhill Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., serving there from 1954-64. During that pastorate, Colson received a call from the executive director of the Hawaii Baptist Convention asking if he would be interested in serving a Hawaiian congregation.

Realizing his sermon text for the following Sunday was Genesis 12 -- God calling Abram to leave his country and follow God's lead -- Colson was assured this was God calling him.

From 1964 to 1973, the Colsons lived on the island of Oahu, where he was pastor of Pali View Baptist Church, while Grace taught at the Hawaii Baptist Academy.

The Colsons returned to the continental United States in 1973, when he accepted a call to be pastor of Mission Village Baptist Church in San Diego.

But after a few years in that California church, the Colsons found themselves called to an even more distant ministry when they became missionary associates in the west African country of Liberia with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

During their seven years of FMB service, both served as teachers at Liberian Junior College and Baptist Seminary. He also pastored the campus church.

In 1985, the Colsons returned to Jacksonville for retirement. Since then, he has started the volunteer chaplaincy program at Orange Park Medical Center and they have become active members of Schindler Drive Baptist Church.

A few days prior to the ceremony, in an interview at their home in Jacksonville, Colson recalled his feelings following the explosion.

"The loss bothered me greatly. I realized I hadn't done my utmost to lead those men (in his crew) to Christ," Colson said, explaining he had witnessed by example but had never really shared his faith with them.

As a result of the tragic mid-air explosion, Colson made a commitment one night while in prison to win 10 men to the Lord. "That day (Nov. 30, 1944) really shook me up and showed me the urgency," he said.

The satisfaction did not stop after winning 10 men to the Lord, Colson said, noting he is still searching for men, women and children with whom he can share the gospel.

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