

BAPTIST FEATURES

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Russian Baptists
Fill Churches

(with photo)

Editor's Note: Eugene Wyatt, Sunday editor of the Nashville Tennessean, had a five-week, 8000-mile trip through the Soviet Union. He traveled under a grant from the Southern Association of Nieman Fellows. Following is one in a series of articles. He has granted Baptist Press permission to reprint.

By Eugene Wyatt

The Sunday morning crowd at the Kiev Evangelical-Baptist Church would delight any middle Tennessee pastor.

The church building seats about 200. On the September morning I attended services there, every seat was occupied. The two aisles were filled with standing worshippers, all the way to the front of the church. Others stood along the walls. The pulpit was crowded.

A small room back of the pulpit was filled. The corridor running alongside the auditorium was jammed. Outside in the courtyard, another 50 or so people listened through the windows.

The service lasted more than two hours. No one left during that time. None of those standing showed restlessness, even the very aged. The congregation was segregated by sex, the men filling one section, the women two.

There were many young people. Several men appeared to be in their early twenties. One blind young man was led in by an older woman.

No children were present. It is still illegal for churches to teach religion to children under 18. However, one member told me he taught his children lessons from the Bible daily at home. This is legal.

The church building itself is of yellow brick. A high wall surrounds it to form a courtyard. A small Russian sign reads "House of Prayer. Kiev Evangelical Baptist Church."

Entrance to the church is through a door in the courtyard wall so small that even persons of normal height must stoop to enter.

I arrived a little late because the cab driver could not locate the building. A middle-aged man greeted me at the gate and asked in Ukrainian where I lived. I replied in Russian. He looked surprised, and said that all Soviet Protestants know Nashville well--because of the Southern Baptist operations here, and because of the seminary (apparently this was a confusion with Louisville).

My seat was to the right of the minister speaking, on the first of five rows of seats occupied by deacons. Behind the minister sat the two ministers who were to speak later. There were three other men, apparently elders. Across the pulpit the choir stood, with the small portable organ in front of them.

Around the wall were little signs of Bible verses in ornate Russian lettering. One said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes Him should not die but have eternal life."

The first minister spoke in Ukrainian, a dialect of Russian so radical few Russians understand it well. When he completed, he bowed his head and began a prayer.

All during the prayer, members of the congregation wept.

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Then the choir sang. The strange mixture of evangelical fervor and the natural sadness of the Slavic folk music was extremely moving. Neither the words nor music of any of the songs was familiar.

The old gentleman sitting next to me had an ancient New Testament with Russian and Greek in parallel columns. He carefully followed each Scripture citation by the minister. Between readings, he placed the book back in a little flannel slip cover which he kept on his lap.

The next sermon was in Russian. The minister was Anatoli Linov, a well-dressed man apparently in his thirties, with a vigorous black moustache. His sermon described the peace of mind which accompanies absolute faith in God. One homily seemed particularly Russian: The peace of God is like the waters of a river. Thick ice may form, but the waters continue under the ice. The river can be dammed, but ultimately the water continues its journey to the sea.

The third sermon, by Presbyter Alexei Andreev, was in Ukrainian. He is an old man with an extraordinarily dignified bearing. His lip trembled as he spoke, and the congregation wept more audibly than before.

After a collection--mostly coins--and announcements of the sick, the service was adjourned.

Outside, in the courtyard, the people who had been weeping so openly inside were almost jovial. Several of them crowded around me. One old lady said: "Tell the people in America that we want only 'mir'--do you understand?--only 'mir.'" Mir means peace.

Suddenly a drunken Russian passing in the street seized me by the arm. "Why do you photograph these uncultured, superstitious people? Come down the street, I'll show you something worth photographing." He pulled roughly at my arm.

It was the only unpleasant experience in the Soviet Union.

Later, one of the ministers of the Moscow Baptist Church, Ilya Orlov, told me Baptists are multiplying rapidly in Russia.

Orlov said the Baptist magazine "Brotherly Messenger" is free to discuss any religious issue. He proudly gave me a copy.

A translation of one of the articles, however, proves the truth of the old saying about discretion and valor:

The article, by N. P. Konoplev, is entitled "On Peace for All The World." It quotes Mark 9:50: "Have peace among you," and Paul's letter to the Hebrews, 12:14: "Try to have peace with all."

It also quotes Nikita Sergeevitch Khrushchev, in his message to the UN: "The first step toward peace must be universal disarmament."

Mr. Konoplev writes the name of Jesus, Paul and Mark with only the first letter capitalized.

Khrushchev is spelled all capitals.

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Cutline to Russian Feature Photo:

KIEV CHURCH--Sunday Editor Eugene Wyatt of the Nashville Tennessean snapped this photo of the Kiev Evangelical-Baptist Church on his trip through Russia. It shows worshippers lingering to chat after the two-hour-long, three sermon service. --Photo from Tennessean.

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December 17, 1961

**Sisemore Defines 'Our
Most Critical Problem'**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' "most critical problem" was defined here in these words:

"In trying to win the lost, we have failed to hold those we have already reached" and to reclaim unenlisted members.

John T. Sisemore, Nashville, superintendent of Adult Sunday school work for the Baptist Sunday School Board, provided the definition. Executive secretaries of state Baptist conventions and secretaries of departments of work in these state bodies composed the audience.

They were here as guests of the board to hear 1962 plans for cooperative work in their areas of responsibility.

Others followed and preceded Sisemore to emphasize the point. R. Earl Waldrup of Nashville, with the board's Training Union department, furnished these statistics:

One of every 10 Southern Baptists will be a new member in some church next year.

In the past, one of two of all church members are enroled in Sunday school, one of five in Training Union. (Church member statistics do not include Nursery, Beginner and Primary ages generally.)

On a given Sunday, one of four Southern Baptists will attend Sunday school and one of seven will be in Training Union.

That this "critical problem" and these statistics were viewed as a challenge and not with despondency was evident in a later statement by Executive Secretary James L. Sullivan of Nashville:

"Our churches have before them their greatest days of advance."

As some indication of the advance possible, these programs and goals were among thos reported:

The First National Conference of Southern Baptist Musicians in Louisville, Ky., in February, 1964. (By W. Hines Sims, secretary of the department of church music, Sunday School Board.)

Four million enroled in Training Union by 1970, compared with present enrolment nearing 2-3/4 million. (By Harvey T. Gibson, of the board's Training Union department staff here.)

A rededication to the "simplicities" of the gospel: "We have one purpose--to bring men to God through Jesus Christ. The Sunday school is the largest and most responsible organization in the Baptist church. To it has been assigned the task of teaching the biblical revelation." (Spoken by Howard P. Colson, Nashville, editor in chief of Sunday school lessons.)

Missionary Asks Loan
Of Stateside Workers

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist agencies in the United States were asked here to share their professional staff workers with Baptists of countries abroad.

The speaker, Missionary George R. Wilson Jr., of Hong Kong, praised the help already given by visiting staff members from several agencies.

Wilson, an educator, serves on the faculty of three schools--Hong Kong Baptist College, Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary and Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary. His Stateside home is Webb City, Mo.

He addressed the men in the best position to authorize and provide such assistance on the mission fields. They included state executive secretaries, who are the chief executive officers of state Baptist conventions, and the heads of many of their departments of state work, who could render the type of help sought.

Also in the group were heads of several Southern Baptist Convention agencies. The SBC Sunday School Board sponsored the banquet meeting.

Wilson asked prayer for the 1964 Sunday school enlargement campaign in the Orient. He said Baptists sometimes "are hampered by self-centered ideas...are too busy counting the cranks of the mimeograph machine."

He also declared, "World missions can't move along at a snail's pace in a day of competition with rockets....We hear the word 'crisis.' In Chinese, the word 'crisis' is formed by a combination meaning 'dangerous opportunity.'" He challenged the group to meet that opportunity.

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Oklahoma Picks Man
To Expand Negro Work

(12-17-61)

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--A nationally recognized Negro educator here has been appointed public relations director for National Baptists in Oklahoma. He is F. D. Moon.

The new post is a joint effort of the National Baptists (Negro), the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (Southern Baptist) and the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board.

Moon will complete a full survey of Negro Baptist churches, pastors and members; promote the program of National Baptists, and train Negro Baptist leaders.

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