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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

**BUREAUS**

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420.250  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420.115  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420.57  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420.72  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173.316

February 16, 1996

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TENNESSEE--Covenant transition team reports meetings with agency leadership.  
GERMANY--1st-century type growth demands mission workers.  
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**CALENDAR**

TENNESSEE--SBC Executive Committee meeting, Feb. 19-21, Nashville.

Covenant transition team reports  
meetings with agency leadership

By Bill Merrell

Baptist Press  
2/16/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Members of the Implementation Task Force continue to meet with the leadership from agencies affected by the restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention as set forth in the "Covenant for a New Century."

"The meetings have been very positive," said ITF chairman Robert Reccord after meeting with the presidents and trustee chairmen of the Brotherhood Commission, Radio and Television Commission and the Home Mission Board, slated to be merged into a new North American Mission Board under the Covenant for a New Century restructuring approved by messengers to the 1995 SBC annual meeting in Atlanta.

"We asked them to tell us their concerns, and give their perspectives and suggestions regarding the implementation of the Covenant for a New Century," said Reccord, a member of the SBC Executive Committee, which created the ITF last fall to oversee the restructuring, scheduled for final approval by messengers to the 1996 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans. Reccord also is pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

"We agreed we have an awesome responsibility," Reccord said. "To significantly restructure our convention enables us to step into the 21st century with the Great Commission at the forefront of all our ministries. I told (the agency leadership) that I felt churches would be watching us, looking for our leadership in how we carried out the implementation. We can unite, prayerfully and biblically, walking together and showing the world how Baptists go about doing kingdom business."

Whenever there is change, Reccord noted, people are uncomfortable. "Whether it be in our homes or at our jobs, change brings a variety of emotions and questions," Reccord said.

"I think the key is the working relationship, and ours is a cooperative one. The leadership of the agencies have been very open and responsive with the information we've requested. At no point has there been any barrier to the cooperative spirit in carrying out what the convention mandated through the covenant."

Reccord said the agency heads had expressed appreciation that the ITF divided into teams, assigning specific task force members to work with specific agencies.

"We're not operating in absentia nor in secret," Reccord said. "We're communicating with them as we research and analyze the best methods of transition. Our focus now is on gathering information because, in a transition as significant and broad-based as the Covenant for a New Century, the volume of information required is massive."

In addition, Reccord has contacted every state executive director, agency head and the entire Executive Committee to ask them to set aside Feb. 21 as a day of prayer and fasting.

"I'm not sure any of us has the human wisdom to do what is needed in the SBC. If we're going to go through this massive change together, we sure need to be praying together. It's critical that we not only communicate and work together, but also that we undergird the entire process by praying together."

In addition to the creation of a North American Mission Board, other changes entailed in the Covenant for a New Century is a reduction in the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12.

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1st-century type growth  
demands mission workers

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
2/16/96

WIESBADEN, Germany (BP)--Church growth rivaling the first century's?

It could be around the corner in Eastern Europe -- if Southern Baptists can meet pressing personnel needs.

One of the most dramatic church growth spurts in modern times is developing across Russia's eight time zones, yet 29 requests for Foreign Mission Board missionaries -- especially church planters and seminary extension teachers -- have proven surprisingly hard to fill.

The Foreign Mission Board has 28 foreign missionaries assigned to the Commonwealth of Independent States, the loose alliance among Russia and other autonomous nations that were once Soviet republics. John Floyd, the board's area director for Europe, would like to see more than 100 workers there within the next two years.

Southern Baptist missionaries are sprinkled across the CIS from Kiev -- adjacent to Poland -- to Khabarovsk -- a city just across the water from Japan.

Since communism fell, the board has been pushing to get personnel into Eastern Europe. That has been easier in some areas than in others.

In Romania, churches have grown dramatically, partly fueled by Southern Baptist financial support, Floyd said. Working with a private foundation, Southern Baptists through the Foreign Mission Board gave \$700,000 for Baptist ministry in Romania. Among nine missionaries sought for Romania, three would serve as directors of missions. "They (Romanians) are so open to the gospel and so energetic in what they want to do," said Floyd.

Baptists in Ukraine have urged the board to send missionaries to each of 28 states within their country. Response is high, crusades still result in many decisions for Christ and churches are springing up rapidly. Several Foreign Mission Board missionary couples have just completed Russian language study and have begun work, said Dan Panter, Floyd's associate for work in Eastern Europe.

Two new Foreign Mission Board missionary couples have just arrived to work in Lithuania as well. Baptists there are so eager for missionary help one man offered a house to live in if someone would come to his city.

To the south, Foreign Mission Board personnel work on both Croat and Serbian sides of the borders in former Yugoslavia. New requests include a general evangelist and a church planter in Serbia and a church planter and church developer for Bosnia.

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In Eastern Europe, time is a factor, Panter added. Recent parliamentary election wins by conservative politicians in Russia could point to hard times ahead. There, and in other parts of the region, communists have joined forces with nationalists and the Russian Orthodox Church to get rid of all outside missionaries.

Already hardliners have drafted laws to outlaw missionaries. A big test for religious freedom will come when Russians vote for a president this summer, because the president wields much influence in deciding which laws are adopted.

"A Russian leader said we must work while we have day, because night is coming. We have to do the best we can now," Panter said, emphasizing the "now."

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Church, missionaries discover  
each other in prayer pilgrimage    By Martha Skelton

Baptist Press  
2/16/96

BELLEVUE, Nebraska (BP)--In America's heartland, members of a Southern Baptist church started praying for new missionaries Larry and Sally Pepper even before they knew the Peppers' name.

The Peppers have begun language study for their work in the eastern African nation of Uganda, where he will be a doctor. They and the church still have not met, but they have been walking a prayer pilgrimage together for some time.

Last year, Steven D. Holdaway, pastor of West Bellevue Baptist Church, Bellevue, Neb., was looking for a way to make Southern Baptist efforts through the Foreign Mission Board more real to his young congregation.

Holdaway decided to participate in a Foreign Mission Board project enlisting churches to pray for specific unfilled personnel needs overseas.

"People like to see personalities, know whom they are supporting," he said. "It was a tangible way to get people behind missions."

The board's International Prayer Strategy Office asked 1,460 churches (10 each for the 146 priority personnel needs for 1995) to pray for one request. West Bellevue was one of 223 churches agreeing to participate. Forty-five of those requests were filled by new or transferred missionaries. After board trustees shared the idea in their churches, 21 of them participated, and three more requests were filled.

West Bellevue prayed that the Foreign Mission Board would find a needed medical doctor to work at Mbarara University of Science and Technology Medical School and Hospital in Uganda.

Pepper was working as a medical doctor and specialist in preventive medicine/aerospace. For seven years, he had been a NASA flight surgeon in Texas. Sensing a call to become missionaries, the Peppers had contacted the Foreign Mission Board. But no medical openings seemed to fit his skills.

Pepper volunteered in October 1994 to work in a Rwandan children's refugee camp in Goma, Zaire. Under intense, crisis conditions, he talked with missionaries from around Africa. He came home with Uganda on his heart and discovered the personnel request West Bellevue and other churches had been praying God would fill.

"That trip was a life-changing event for me. I knew God was calling us, and as I began to pray, I knew even stronger that he was calling us to Uganda," Pepper recounted.

West Bellevue will stay linked to the Peppers by mail -- and through those continuing prayers. While Pepper works as a physician, Sally will home school her three children -- Adam, 9, Megan, 7, and Kelly, 6.

The church would like to meet the Peppers someday, perhaps during a furlough, Holdaway said. With an average Sunday attendance of 225, West Bellevue doubled its giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering in 1995 to \$1,100.

Churches interested in praying for the 1996 personnel requests may call (804) 219-1552 to participate in this or other prayer efforts.

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**50 of 645 new jobs overseas  
called 'priority' by FMB**

By Martha Skelton

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has selected 645 new career missionary jobs to fill in 1996, 50 of which have been designated strategic priority requests.

The 50 priorities reflect a global emphasis by board area directors. Half of these are for missionaries to work in virtually unevangelized parts of the world. The rest are to further evangelize areas already highly responsive to the gospel or to accomplish other strategic goals.

Last year Foreign Mission Board missionaries began work with 41 new people groups, many of them virtually untouched with the gospel. In 10 years, the board has increased its total resources committed to unreached people groups from 1 percent to 13.5 percent, said Avery Willis, senior vice president for overseas operation.

But this is just a beginning. "It will take a mission force equal to our present number of missionaries (4,100-plus) just to have one missionary unit (single or married couple) assigned to each unreached people group," Willis said. This year's requests address this goal.

The priority list gives board officials the opportunity to "encourage applicants to look at top (priorities) within a certain skill," said Jim Riddell, associate director of the board's missionary personnel department. His department reviews the list monthly.

While sharing the gospel falls under every missionary's portfolio, the majority of personnel requests specify evangelism and church planting as an actual assignment. A sampling of those priority requests include:

- Church starter in the historic area of Novgorod, Russia, or the Andean town of Cajamarca, Peru, and other locations.

- Evangelist/health worker in Kanuri, Nigeria.
- Student worker in South Korea.

Other assignments focus on specialized needs:

- Teaching hearing-impaired students at a school in Gaza.
- Teaching soil conservation and crop management among the Afar people in Ethiopia, or in Madagascar, helping local farmers in animal husbandry.

Some priority requests call for dual roles, such as one for a church developer/pilot for a remote area of Equatorial Brazil. In this case, other missionaries assigned to this area cannot begin their work until this position is filled.

Missionaries on the field last year were able to respond to spiritual and human needs beyond their actual program assignments. Among those:

- Missionaries and Japanese Baptists helped after a Jan. 17 earthquake. A church opened its facility to be a relief center. Missionaries distributed supplies to needy families.

- Gary and Annetta Marie Snowden coordinated a sports evangelism project during the Pan American Games in Argentina last spring. Highlighting the effort were decisions for Christ and the distribution of Bibles and Christian literature.

- Southern Baptists provided funds to buy food, blankets and other needed items for refugees in Chechnya, the ethnic area locked in a civil war battle with Russia. Missionaries monitored its use.

- Southern Baptist missionary pilot Mike Cannata in Tanzania found three missionary colleagues and two children of missionaries after they had been kidnapped and then deserted in a wild game park last August. Overwhelmed by the immense area they needed to search, Cannata prayed. Less than 10 minutes later, he found the group basically safe and healthy. "It was the hand of the Lord. He guided the plane," Cannata said.

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The board's priority focus has worked well matching applicants and their gifts to critical needs. Last year, of 129 priority requests considered "fillable" (not including those canceled or put on hold), 60 were filled, said Lloyd Atkinson, director of the board's personnel selection department.

Some are repeated several years before being filled.

"There is no doubt in my mind that God has called someone to fill each one of these," Atkinson said.

Anyone interested in learning more about career missionary service through priority requests or other needs may call 1-800-999-3113 or write P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230.

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(BP) graphic (horizontal) mailed 2/16/96 to editors of Baptist state papers by the Richmond (foreign) bureau of Baptist Press. A cutline for the graphic has been posted in the SBCNet News Room.

EDITORS' ADVISORY follow-up to a Feb. 12 (BP) story: Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary Wade Watts was brought from Lima, Peru, to Memphis, Tenn., by medical evacuation airplane Feb. 13. His condition at Baptist Memorial Hospital-Central is unchanged: comatose and critical, but stable. His 10-year-old son, Marcus, continues to show evidence of waking up from his coma -- moving his limbs and opening his eyes -- and doctors expect to move him from the hospital to a rehabilitation facility in about two weeks. Nancy Watts also continues to need prayer as she adjusts to the realities of supporting Wade, Marcus and their other son, Joshua, who is recuperating from a broken ankle, said Bill Goff, associate director for work in Spanish South America. Southern Baptists are asked to continue to pray for this family.

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PK clergy rally rebukes  
racial, religious barriers

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
2/16/96

ATLANTA (BP)--More than 39,000 Christian ministers seeking revival -- both personal and spiritual -- prayed, praised, wept and worshiped throughout the first Promise Keepers clergy conference, Feb. 13-15.

Under the theme "Fan into Flame," church and para-church leaders addressed topics of revival and racial and denominational unity. Promise Keepers' Vice President Dale Schlafer billed it as "the largest and most diverse meeting of God's shepherds in the world."

Speakers urged ministers from every state and a dozen countries to trust God, model reconciliation and lead their congregations to spiritual revival.

Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney started the meeting by pleading for an end to racism and denominational strife. "The contention between denominations has gone on long enough," he said with the enthusiasm of a former college football coach. "If the church ever stood together, almighty God would have his way."

Racial inclusion has been among the organization's specific goals. McCartney has traveled to meet with ethnic pastors in more than 50 inner-city areas, said Steven Chavis, Promise Keepers' national media spokesman. "The message has been received with mixed results because of the pain."

In a scene reminiscent of Southern Baptists' 1995 passage of a resolution on racial reconciliation, representatives of Anglos, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians prayed for forgiveness for racism, hatred and unforgiveness.

Anglo pastors gave a long standing ovation, chanting, "We love you" as black pastors walked to the front of the stage for a show of appreciation. Black pastors responded by chanting, "You are forgiven." Yelled McCartney: "We love you. We would die for you guys."

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Conference speaker and Southern Baptist Henry Blackaby told Baptist Press the conference is another expression of what he's seen God doing to bring revival to America.

"I've really sensed that there is almost an irresistible movement of God on the hearts of the leadership to move their thinking toward revival," he said.

Blackaby, Home Mission Board director of prayer for spiritual awakening, noted spiritual revival will accomplish both Christian unity and an end to racism. "Most of the books I read on reconciliation are man-centered. 'We've got to bring down the barriers.' Well, we can't bring down the barriers," he said.

"We can't bring down the racial walls any more than Joshua could bring down the walls of Jericho. But when they obeyed God, God brought down the walls."

The meeting was significant, Blackaby said, because it focused on leadership of churches, agencies and para-church organizations. "Biblical and historical revival has come when the leaders got right with God," he said. "I would say we would be a lot farther away from revival if we were not seeing a meeting of leaders."

Blackaby spoke to the pastors about the importance of being led by the spirit of God and doing the will of God. "As goes the leaders, so goes the church," he said. "Revival is spirit-filled leaders walking in the midst of a church that becomes spirit-filled just like them."

Speakers also touted the meeting as a refreshment for pastors feeling alone and discouraged. "We have many who have taken the field who are beaten and bruised and broken," said Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas. "Many of you have resigned from the clergy long ago, you just haven't informed the board yet."

A 1991 survey of pastors found 90 percent said they work more than 46 hours per week. The survey, by Arch Hart of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., also found:

- 80 percent said they believe the pastoral ministry is negatively affecting their families.

- 70 percent said they have no one they consider a close friend.

- 50 percent said they feel unable to meet the job's demands.

- 40 percent reported having a serious conflict at least monthly with a parishioner.

Southern Baptist pastor Bob AuBuchon of Willow Springs, Mo., acknowledged the cost of leading a congregation. "As a pastor, there's things that get you down, but you don't let the people see it."

AuBuchon said his congregation, Trinity Baptist, paid his way to the conference. "They're praying that the Lord would touch me and he has. He's reignited the flame," AuBuchon said. "It's been a reaffirmation of my call to minister, to preach."

Spokesman Chavis predicted the conference's impact will be far-reaching. "We returned to America a new pastor, and we look forward to learn the depth of those changes."

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(BP) photos of Blackaby and McCartney are available from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press by calling (770) 410-6535.

Name change, SBC structure info  
top state editors' sessions

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
2/16/96

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (BP)--State Baptist paper editors, meeting in annual session, approved a name change, voted associate membership for two news services and "strongly" encouraged a committee working on the Southern Baptist Convention restructuring to provide more information on its work.

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Called the Southern Baptist Press Association for many years, the group approved a recommendation from a study group to become The Association of State Baptist Papers. The new name more clearly reflects the group's identity of newspapers and journals of the 39 state conventions and regional fellowships, proponents said. The history of the 100-year-old organization has been published and will become available in June, officials said.

Also approved was a membership change which provides a new "associate" class membership for two news services: Baptist Press, the news service of the SBC, and Associated Baptist Press, an autonomous news service in Jacksonville, Fla. Previously, Baptist Press, which was formed through the urging of the press association in 1946, had been included in the group's regular membership. The change allows the associate members to take an active part in the association's meetings but not with voting privileges.

The editors voiced displeasure with the lack of news media access to the meetings of the Implementation Task Force. The ITF is a committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee to begin the process of implementing the "Covenant for a New Century," a plan of reorganization approved by messengers last year to the SBC annual meeting. The restructuring would reduce the number of SBC entities from 19 to 12.

Editors approved a resolution citing the restructuring's "massive changes," requests from pastors and laypeople for news "about the specifics of the proposed" changes and that a "free flow of information is essential to an informed vote in June." A change in the SBC's bylaw 15, which identifies by name all the entities, requires two consecutive votes by messengers to SBC annual meetings. The first approval came last year at the Atlanta SBC meeting.

The resolution said SBC Executive Committee policies provide for denominational and secular press coverage of EC subcommittees under background rules, with the exception of essential executive sessions. But "neither Baptist Press nor the (press association) have been allowed to attend any meetings of the ITF" because, the group was advised, "the ITF is dealing with legal and personnel issues that cannot be handled properly in a public forum."

Editors "strongly" encouraged the EC and the ITF to honor the policy of press relations and permit coverage of those meetings. The resolution also asked the EC and ITF to "honor the concerns of constituents and the historic right of Baptists to be informed about any actions affecting their cooperative work at every level by providing regular progress reports to Southern Baptists through Baptist Press news service and by holding at least one announced press conference by mid-May, 1996."

Bob Reccord, chairman of the ITF, and Morris H. Chapman, president of the EC, both met with the editors prior to the vote on the resolution. Reccord, pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., gave a report on the ITF's progress -- which he said had been to this point primarily gathering information, analyzing it, getting briefed in legal and related aspects -- and sought input from the editors. The ITF has met three times -- in November, January and February -- and has invested 1,800 manhours to date, he said. He took under advisement the editors' request for entrance to the ITF meetings and news media access to the work of the task force.

Several editors questioned why the meetings were closed and why costs for the restructuring were not being made available.

Glen Brown, editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger, said "out in the churches, pastors are asking 'what's happening.'"

Reccord did tell the editors that a progress report, including some recommendations from the ITF, would be given at the Executive Committee's Feb. 19-21 meeting in Nashville, Tenn. He asked them to encourage people to have "patience" with the ITF and that what happens would be a "positive process."

Chapman said he felt the intent of the ITF was to bring specific and concrete information to the Baptist public on a consistent basis.

"The ITF wants nothing more than to communicate accurately what is happening," Chapman said. "The complexities of the issues are enormous."

Reccord later told Baptist Press that news information, on a regular basis, would be forthcoming from the task force.

In other action, the editors, meeting in conjunction with the state executive directors in Puerto Rico, elected Michael McCullough, editor of The Nevada Baptist, as president-elect. McCullough has been editor of the Reno-based publication for 13 years and will become president of the association following the February 1997 meeting in San Francisco. Bill Webb, editor of the Illinois Baptist and soon to become editor of Missouri's Word and Way news journal, assumed the president's gavel from Toby Druin, editor of the Texas Baptist Standard, at the conclusion of the meeting.

Also, the editors heard reports from Charnel Anderson, professor of history at Puerto Rico's Inter American University; David McHam, professor of journalism at Southern Methodist University, Dallas; and Don Rutledge, photographer with the SBC Foreign Mission Board. In addition, editors evaluated the two news services, honored retiring South Carolina editor John Roberts, took a mission tour of a number of island churches, OK'd a resolution of appreciation for former New York editor Chip Lockwood, welcomed several new editors and took care of miscellaneous business.

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CORRECTION: In the (BP) story, "Northern lights kindled his Alaskan commitment," dated 2/14/96, please change the reference to Meridan, Ala., to Meridian, Miss.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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