



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

---FEATURES
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**Churches In Europe Require
2,000 New Members A Year**

by Theo Sommerkamp
Director, European Baptist Press Service

It may sound impossible, but at least 30 Baptist churches in Europe will lose every one of their present members, including their pastors, during the next three years.

Despite this trend, which has been occurring for years already, the churches will survive with about the same number of members, the Sunday Schools will go on without interruption and the women's societies probably will not miss a meeting.

The churches are English-language Baptist congregations located in Europe. They are almost entirely American in membership.

"It's a big miracle these churches live through this constant coming and going of members and pastors," commented William J. (Bill) Guess, of Frankfurt, West Germany, a Southern Baptist foreign missionary who coordinates the churches' work.

Banded together in the European Baptist Convention (English-language), there are 25 such churches in Western Germany, four in England and one each in France and Italy.

All but a small number of these churches minister to United States Army and Air Force personnel and their families. The only Europeans in the churches are wives of a few military men, or a handful of local citizens who want to improve their English. They are so few in number, however, that the churches could be considered fully American.

The churches have combined membership of close to 5,000, according to Guess, who is general secretary-treasurer for the convention. Guess said he believes total membership has leveled off at this figure, barring a mass recall of American servicemen in Europe.

"We have to gain 2,000 new members every year just to stay even," Guess said. Of the additions, about 350 are new converts baptized by the churches. Army personnel usually rotate at the end of two years, and Air Force servicemen usually stay three years.

The 30 churches collect about \$500,000 a year through their Sunday offerings. The European Baptist Convention annually contributes \$2,000 to the operating budget of the European Baptist Federation, and spends all of its \$10,000 home mission fund in Europe.

The constitution of the convention urges the closest possible ties with Baptists of Europe and encourages the churches to join and contribute to the national Baptist Union in whatever country it is located.

For 10 years prior to the eviction of American forces in France in 1967, eight such English-language churches were organized and then disbanded. The French Baptist Federation felt the sudden loss of money when the churches were dissolved.

When the English-language church at Orleans, France, disbanded, keys to the building were given to the pastor of the local French-speaking Baptist group. The departing Americans made a final gift of \$2,100 to the French Baptist Federation.

The property of the 500-member Faith Baptist Church, a fairly new building on the outskirts of Kaiserslautern, West Germany, is registered in the name of German Baptists. American funds, however, built the \$140,000 masonry structure. It would belong to German Baptists if Americans withdrew.

Pastors for all but two of the churches come from America. A few are sent through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. This follows a request of the SBC at its annual meeting about 10 years ago that the Foreign Mission Board help develop English-speaking churches in major cities around the world, Guess explained.

Thus, the pastors of English-language churches in West Berlin, Madrid, Brussels, Munich, and Paris are mission board personnel.

The rest came from America on their own at the call of the congregations they serve.

W. R. (Ray) Reynolds left a growing suburban church in Atlanta, to come to the 117-member Neckar Valley Baptist Church in Sindelfingen, West Germany, south of Stuttgart.

Reynolds sold two automobiles and his furniture to come. Like other non-missionary pastors, he signed a contract to serve three years as its pastor. This contract covers transportation costs for Reynolds, his wife and their three children. Helen Reynolds teaches in a kindergarten on a military base.

Reynolds is halfway through his three-year contract. When it ends, he must find his own pastoral connection in America again.

An interest in missions drew Reynolds abroad. His application to become an SBC foreign missionary was held up temporarily for medical reasons. At this time, the call from Sindelfingen came.

Reynolds, though happy in Europe, still feels isolated. He has no chance to study the German language, and very little opportunity to use it.

Since the Sindelfingen American group uses the building of the German Baptist congregation, talks are necessary from time to time about rent and schedules. Translators are needed for these discussions.

The two groups have joint services twice a year. Each pastor preaches a short sermon. Both messages are translated. Hymns that have common tunes and topics in German and English are picked.

Otherwise, the German church meets from 10 to 11 Sunday mornings. Americans start their Sunday School about 11:15. Preaching follows at 12:30. Rarely can the Reynolds' eat lunch before 2 o'clock. Only the Americans have preaching on Sunday night.

The church in Kaiserslautern is used exclusively by Americans. One interesting case occurs in Bad Kreuznach, where the German congregation shares a church rented by the American group. One English-language church meets in the building of a German Lutheran church.

Though distinctively Southern Baptist in style and though they send money to the Southern Baptist Convention, these churches can not elect voting messengers to the SBC because of a constitutional requirement that limits this to churches in the USA.

The European Baptist pastors feel that few of the 11 million Southern Baptists know the churches in Europe exist. They feel an urgent need for help from churches in America to send to them the names of military personnel in Europe.

As it is, the European churches rely on word-of-mouth and folders stuck in mail boxes in housing areas to advertise themselves. They get little or no help from the military.

There is a marked parallel between recent SBC outreach in America and the English-speaking church growth in Europe. As Southern Baptists moved out of the South into other parts of the USA, they formed churches like those they left behind. This sometimes rankled existing Baptist (but not SBC) churches outside the South,

churches
Both the SBC/outside the southern USA and the English-speaking congregations in Europe began without official prompting, usually in private homes. Both appeal to people with staunch Baptist convictions who do not accept ecumenical Protestant programs such as those of military chapels.

English-speaking churches in Europe have a unique personality. Their only traditions are the ones their members bring overseas with them.

All the churches face the constant problem of finding new deacons and Sunday School teachers. Because of their frequent change of posts, military people say it is hard to form long-lasting, deep friendships.

The American churches abroad are racially integrated. For some of the pastors who came from the deep South, it is their first time to have Negro members.

One Negro communications specialist with almost 20 years of military experience, Caroll Broadfoot, is serving as interim pastor of the church at Baumholder, near Kaiserslautern, Germany. When he is discharged in a few months, Broadfoot, 40, wants to make the ministry his second career. He hopes to enter Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

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3

Baptist Press Feature

Pastors of the English-speaking churches in Europe admit that their members do not have as much regular contact with European Baptists as they would like. Some of the Americans used vacation time recently to attend the European Baptist Conference in Vienna, Austria, to get better acquainted with European Baptists.

A number of European Baptist leaders visited the English-speaking churches last year, including the general secretaries for the Baptist unions in Holland, Scotland, West Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the European Baptist Federation secretary, C. Ronald Goulding.

Goulding has commended the churches for their interest in European Baptist work, adding that their contributions to the European Baptist Federation are among the highest of any Baptist union or convention in Europe. All the other unions are made up of Europeans.

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